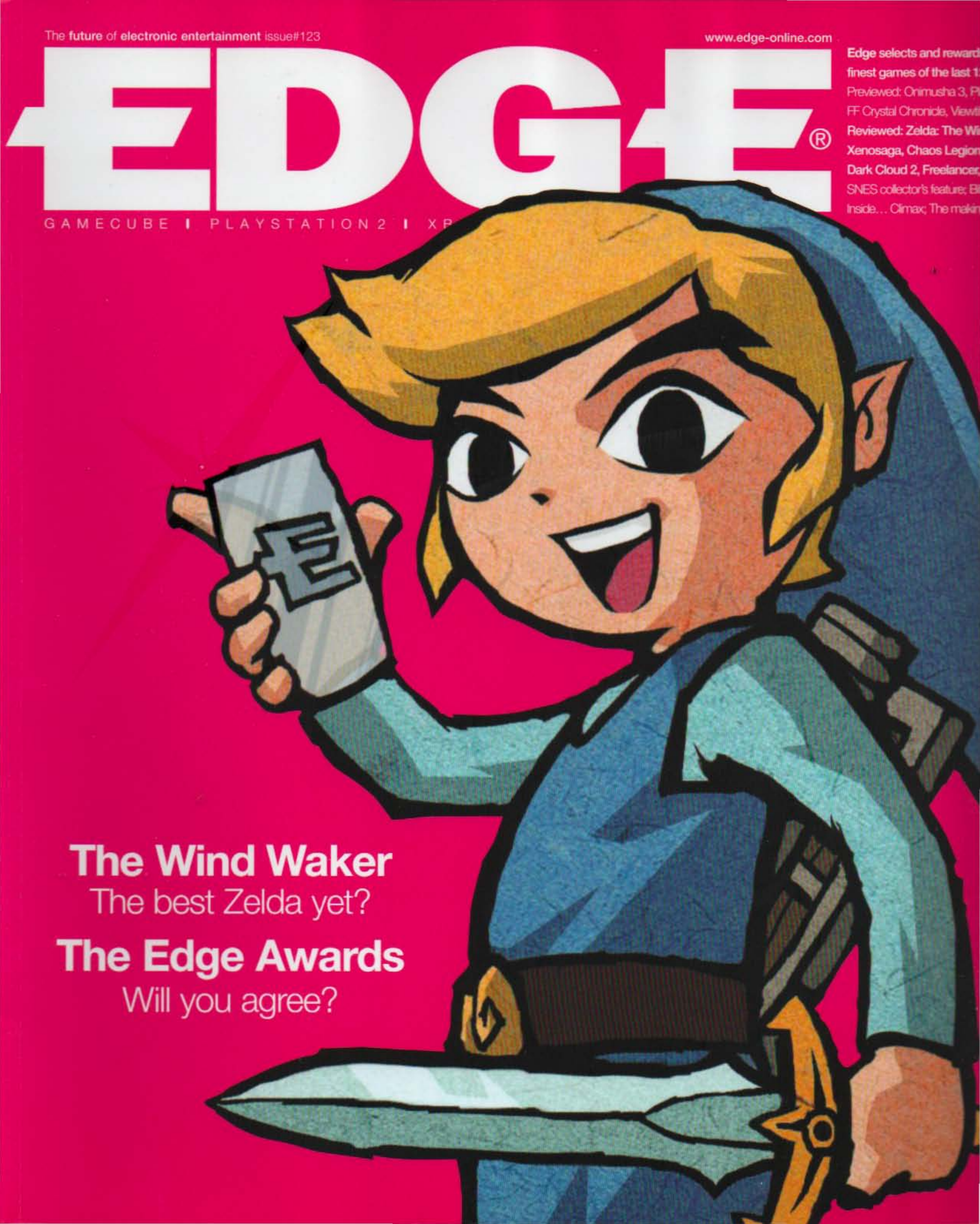
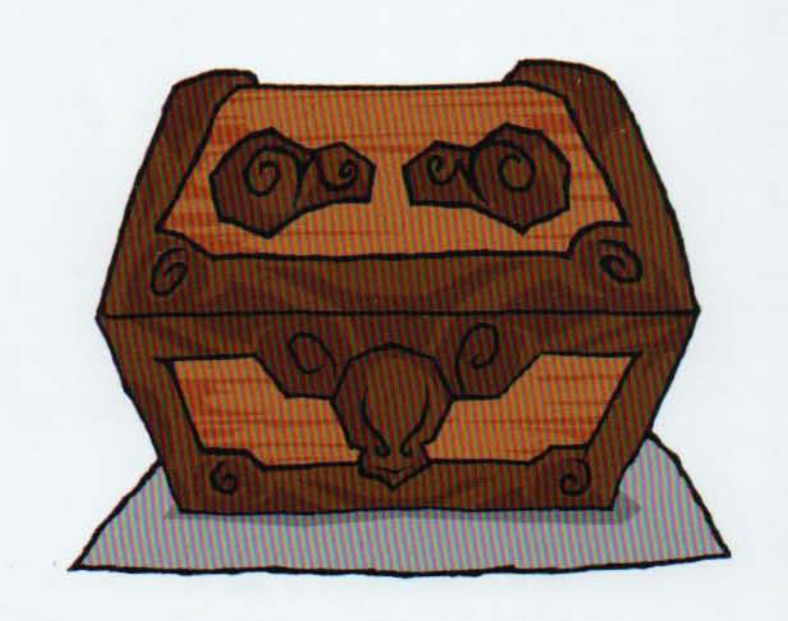


The future of electronic entertainment issue#123
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Edge selects and
finest games of the last
Previewed: Onimusha 3,
FF Crystal Chronicle,
Reviewed: Zelda: The
Xenosaga, Chaos
Dark Cloud 2,
SNES collector's
Inside... Climax; The
The Wind Waker
The best Zelda yet?
The Edge Awards
Will you agree?





Right, pay attention. You'll undoubtedly have your own view of what should have been game of the year; which piece of hardware should have made the top three; and why the remaining six categories also contain the incorrect entries.

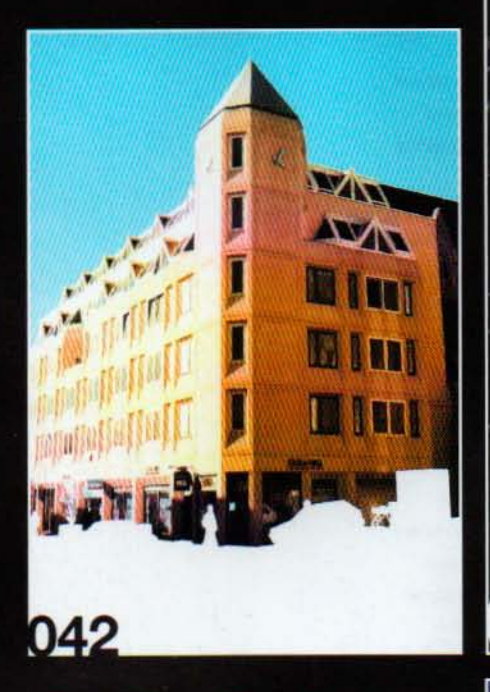
Good. Opinion is healthy. However, don't bother emailing in – the reader awards aren't happening just yet. In this issue you'll find **Edge**'s choices: what *we* feel represents the fairest appraisal of the soft- and hardware releases of the last 12 months (in other words, everything that has appeared in, and including, **E**110 to **E**122).

For those still asleep at the back, this obviously means that this month's cover star, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, does not constitute part of this selection. How different would the results have been had Nintendo got its translators working double shifts to ensure an earlier US release? It's a redundant question – the company would then have had very little to keep American players focused on its console during the important Easter period (and similarly, nothing to boost European sales in May once the game gets a PAL outing – *Super Metroid* obviously took care of the calendar's first quarter). Still, if it amuses you, you can always speculate where the latest *Zelda* adventure might have slotted in from this month's review – try p88.

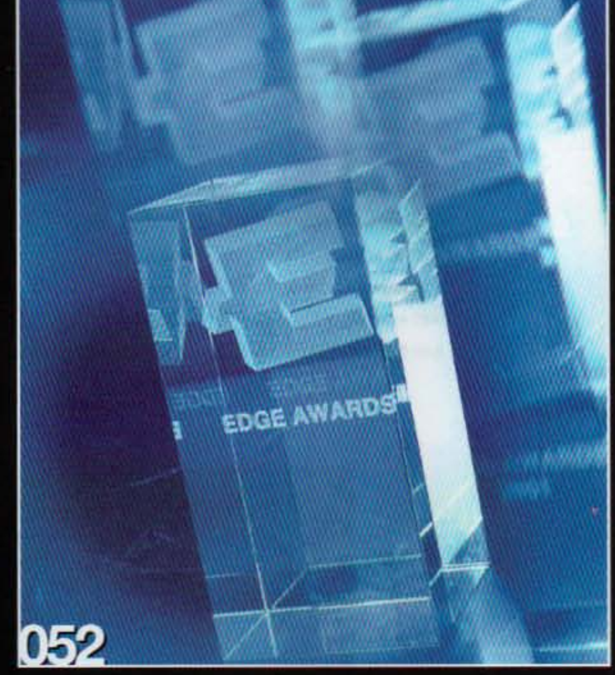
It's an interesting time for Nintendo. A recent episode involving the Dixons Group and retailer Argos – had either company not re-evaluated its decision to stop stocking the GameCube (see p11) – could have proved devastating for the Kyoto publisher. The videogame marketplace has changed. There's an almost palpable nervousness in the air. The Dreamcast and N64 failures, still painfully fresh in some industry minds, ensure that many will currently display a tendency to overreact. Of course, the end of term isn't here yet and – provided it applies itself – it's not too late for Nintendo to turn its performance around. But it really must try harder.



Features









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"Dude, you have a bazooka. Stop thinking Prague Police and start thinking PlayStation – blow shit up!"

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GameDevelopers
Conference
SAN JOSE MCENERY CONVENTION

Networking is the message at GDC

The tribulations of online gaming and the opportunities provided by mobile gaming were two of the key focuses at the 2003 Game Developers Conference in San Jose

After 12 months that have seen the economic power of many developers decline while top publishers rake in record profits, the 2003 Game Developers Conference was always going to be a bitter-sweet event.

There was plenty of activity around the career pavilion, for example, as those with funded projects in development picked over the hundreds of artists and coders who have been made redundant. It was certainly convenient for the former members of Midway's Milpitas development group. Situated a couple of miles from the San Jose Convention Center where GDC is held, the 100-strong studio was recently shut down as Midway, like many other publishers, culled internal capacity in order to cut operating costs. Meanwhile, a couple of enterprising types raised wry smiles as they sat around the conference with 'Job wanted' or 'Will texture for food' signs stuck to the backs of their laptops.

It was left to GDC's de facto conscience, Ion Storm's **Warren Spector**, to try and give the situation a positive spin. In a design keynote entitled 'Sequels and Adaptions: Design Innovation in a Risk-Averse World', the Sage of Austin attacked head-on the issue of whether the current state of the industry is killing creativity.

"I've worked on licences such as Rocky and Bullwinkle and Buck Rogers in the past, and I've not felt constrained by them," Spector revealed. "Okay, you don't get to do your own stuff working with a licence but there are positives as well. I begged Eidos to be allowed to make a game based on the 'Tomb Raider' movie," he added.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom. The heads of studios, such as id's Todd Hollenshead and Relic's Ron Moravek spoke about running a successful studio, while BioWare's co-founder Ray Muzyka went beyond the call of duty, chairing five roundtables in three days handing out advice to startups on subjects such as handling publishers, publicity and marketing. Other strong conference strands included the now-standard two-day academic conference, a women in games group and the game-design workshop.



San Jose at dusk – this is when all the fun begins with several company-hosted parties on every night of the conference

> "A couple of enterprising types raised smiles as they sat with 'Job wanted' or 'Will texture for food' signs stuck to the backs of their laptops"

Elsewhere, the thorny issue of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) consumed lots of bandwidth. As at previous GDCs, Sony Online Entertainment's **Raph Koster** and **Rich Vogel**, creative lead and development director respectively for *Star Wars Galaxies*, scared the opposition with a day long tutorial into the problems running MMOGs. This year they also



Unlike Microsoft and Nintendo, Sony splashed out some marketing money on a large stand, highlighting development technology such as the PlayStation2 Performance Analyzer, as well as examples of online and voice-activated games

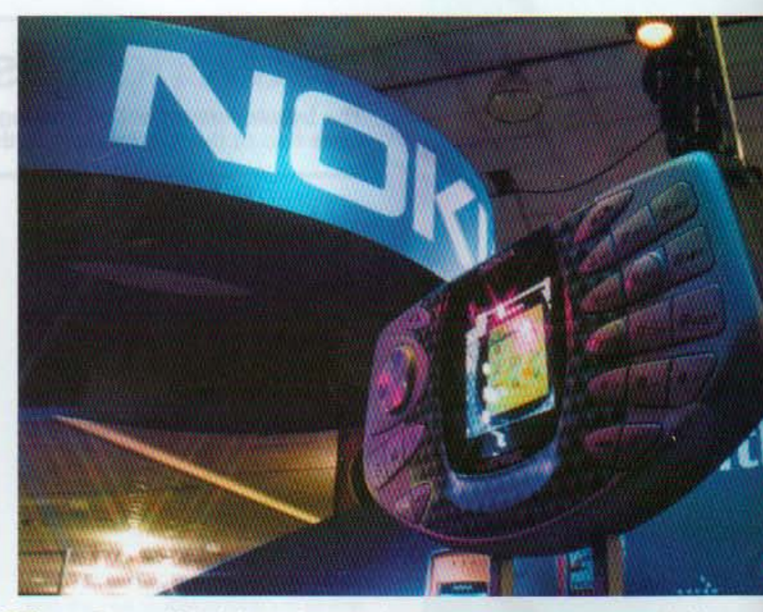




Held once again at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, the Game Developers Conference is a four-day event attended by around 10,000 game developers







Nokia boasted one of the largest stands on the GDC expo floor, and it had plenty of camera phones, game decks and free dev kits for people to play with. Big US semi-conductor companies such as Intel and nVidia also used their marketing muscle to make a splash at GDC

joined forces with another online veteran; EA's **Gordon Walton**, the executive producer of *The Sims Online*.

"The biggest problem developing online games is they operate in a fundamentally different paradigm to offline games," Walton said. "It's something I've had to kick against throughout my career. The more success you get with an online game, the bigger drain it becomes on the publisher's resources."

One reason for this, he explained, was publishers expect a 65–85 per cent profit on gross sales for successful games. The most successful online games only make 30–50 per cent, however, because of their higher development and ongoing maintenance costs. "It drags down the publisher's overall gross profit and that worries them," Walton said.

Ironically, the day before GDC started, EA announced its online experiment was over and EA.com would be rolled back into its core business. This means it will no longer provide separate financial figures for online activity. It also cancelled *Motor City Online*, a persistent online racing game. According to the final press release from the game's development team, *MCO* suffered because it "was evident that the game was quickly dominated by skilled players… new players were faced with more defeats than helping hands."

Revealing the enormous investment required to create such a game, Vogel commented that on top of its standard development team, online games also require a live team. Consisting of 27 staff, the *Star Wars Galaxies* team is designed to deal with day-to-day problems and community relations. *Star Wars Galaxies* will also have around ten digiteers, players paid by Sony to generate in-game events. And in addition to all this, the game requires six shifts of customer support staff providing 24/7 cover to deal with problems ranging from players who can't correctly type in their serial number to game bugs.

It's cost implications such as these that mean when *Star Wars Galaxies* finally launches, access will be strictly controlled to ensure quality of service. "The launch is crucial because all the people who have bought the game will try to play it," Vogel pointed out. "We've already taken 400,000 pre-orders but there's no way we can handle that number of players in the first week."

On the plus side, all three speakers expressed the view that there was an opportunity for niche online games, that is those which cater for up to 25,000 subscribers. Not only do such games only cost a couple of million dollars to develop, but they can charge their audience much higher rates. "With *EverQuest*, we only get up to $200 per year from a subscriber, whereas some of the niche products manage to squeeze up to $1,000 per player," Koster stated.

Another key player in the online gaming space at GDC was NCsoft's CEO Tack Jin Kim, owner of the world's most popular online game, *Lineage*, which has more than 3m active users in Korea. In contrast to US games, 98 per cent of *Lineage* users connect via broadband, although most play the game in PC gaming cafes rather than at home. NCsoft is now attempting to break into the US market and, as a part of this, is funding the creator of the *Ultima* series Richard Garriott's new company. And it's certainly got money to burn. In its last financial year, the company made a profit of $45m (£29m) on sales of $123m (£78m).

Ringing the changes

Connectivity and gaming of a different kind was on the agenda at the two-day GDC Mobile sessions. First of the keynotes was **Takeshi Natsuno**, executive vice president of NTT DoCoMo i-mode. Claiming to be the largest Internet service provide in the world – i-mode

> "We've already taken 400,000 pre-orders of Star Wars Galaxies but there's no way we can handle that number of players in the first week"

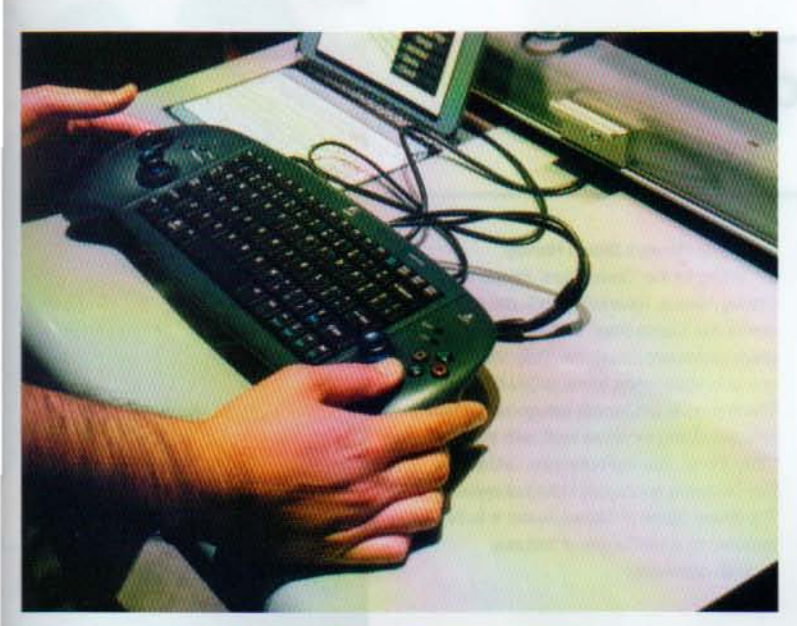


Tack Jin Kim, NCsoft's CEO, gave a business keynote entitled, 'Applying the Lessons Learned on Korea and *Lineage* to Today's and Tomorrow's Online Games'. *Lineage* is the largest subscription online game in the world with over 3m subscribers

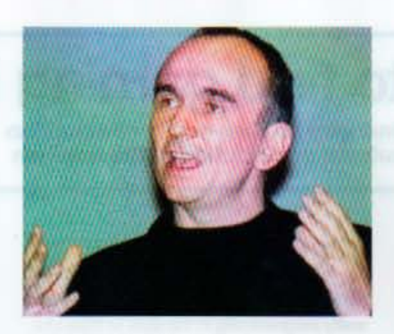
Friendly enemies

In a packed conference program, two talks stood out. The first was billed as a deathmatch between Naughty Dog's **Jason Rubin** and Insomniac's **Ted Price**. Good friends, who work closely together and share technology, they took it in turns to trash each other's games in what started out, at least, in a semi-constructive manner. "*Spyro* was a fabulous-looking game filled with a forgettable character," reckoned Rubin; a comment Price swiftly countered saying, "Jak was a mutant elf with bad clothes. I hated him." More interestingly, they agreed that their most recent projects, *Jak and Daxter* and *Ratchet & Clank*, hadn't worked as they had hoped, although sequels for both are in the pipeline.

And continuing in a similar theme, Tsurumi Roppyaku and Ryoichi Hasegawa gave a talk about developing games for the Japanese market. Both men have worked on games such as *Crash*, *Spyro*, *Jak and Daxter* and most recently *Sly Raccoon*. Changes made to these games for Japan ranged from ensuring characters' pupils are black, not coloured, to using an different anime-style skeleton for animation.



Designed to work with *EverQuest* on PS2, Logitech's keyboard has been approved by Sony. The game, just launched in the US, is doing well with a fifth server already added







Like its competitors, Discreet, the company behind 3ds max, held regular tutorial sessions during GDC. It also used the show to announce the release of a Game Export Interface for the 3D modelling package

has 36m subscribers in Japan – Natsuno-san pointed to the importance of the user experience as the key driver of the mobile world. "We limit downloads to ten seconds and don't talk about technology," he pointed out. For example, DoCoMo never mentions Java. Instead it labels Java-capable phones as DoJa phones; turning the technology into a marketing concept.

He also warned western telecoms that the move to 3G networks needs to be carefully sold to consumers. "Our experience of FOMA [DoCoMo's video phones] hasn't been successful because we need to have a gradual evolution between 2G and 3G services," he said. "Faster connection speeds do not mean richer content."

The keynote from Nokia's senior vice president of media and entertainment, **Ilkka Raiskinen**, echoed some of these points. "Technology doesn't sell, benefits do," he stated, reinforcing Nokia's commitment as a publisher for innovative content, as well as warming the hearts of developers who see Nokia's N-Gage device as a potential new revenue stream.

Unsurprisingly, the company is keen to stress that those who are slavishly comparing N-Gage to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance have the wrong end of the stick. "The pace of technological introduction is the big difference between phones and the traditional console model," Raiskinen pointed out. Considering the speed of the hardware cycle of phones, it's widely assumed that Nokia is already working on a N-Gage2.



Everyone's favourite night of the show is the booth crawl, in which company sponsorship results in free beer

Mobile infancy

Another area Nokia will be pushing with N-Gage is network gaming, whether it be face-to-face gaming via Bluetooth, location-based or via the mobile phone network itself. "There are opportunities which are yet to be crystallised," enthused Raiskinen. "Think about mobility."

But with respect to the issue of pricing, he gave little away. "We will do whatever it takes to make N-Gage a massmarket device," was all that was offered. It seems unlikely that Nokia will be subsidising N-Gage itself in the manner of consoles, however. In Finland, for example, it's against the law for companies to sell mobile phones in this way. Yet, considering the sheer numbers of devices Nokia sells – it sold 46m in the last three months for example – there are sure to be millions of N-Gages in use. The only question seems to be, once bought will they be used as phones or gaming devices?

More generally, though, the device did seem to go down well with developers. Tools company Metrowerks also got in on the prevailing mood, releasing a development kit for Nokia's Series 60 technology, which is the software foundation on which N-Gage is based. And as well as Nokia, Motorola and Sony, Ericsson had a presence on the GDC show floor too, underlining the fact that mobile gaming is here to stay.



nVidia's CEO Jen-Hsun Huang took to the stage to announced the company's new range of GeForce FX graphics cards in a breakfast briefing

The other major point of interest at the show, at least for PC fanatics, was the on-running spat between graphics companies nVidia and ATI. Both announced refreshes of their existing highend boards as well as a diffusion of technology into much cheaper massmarket hardware. ATI claims its Radeon 9800 part, which retails at $399 (£254), maintains its number one performance ranking; something seemingly admitted by nVidia's CEO **Jen-Hsun Huang**, who vowed nVidia would, "shortly regain its performance leadership." His big selling tag was "DX9 for 79", which refers to the company's GeForce FX 5200 board. This will support DirectX 9 and, unsurprisingly, sell at a price point of $79 (£50). For those that care about such things, ATI's equivalent part, the Radeon 9200, is more expensive and only uses DirectX 8.1.



Sony London's EyeToy peripheral, which combines PlayStation2 with motion inputs captured via a USB Webcam, was a hit on the show floor

'Game Stars' to find gaming idol

ITV is set to grant the videogame industry its own reality competition show, but ITC refuses to see the cultural contribution of the medium



A mix of celebrity hosts and interludes by bands should ensure a wide audience for 'Game Stars'

This Easter weekend will see the broadcast, on ITV1, of 'Game Stars', a high-profile bid to combine videogames with reality programming in the style of 'Pop Idol' and its ilk. The show has been engineered by videogame specialist PR agency Barrington Harvey and broadcaster Granada, who are aiming for a higher profile than that achieved by previous industry television excursions. As well as attempting to find the nation's best gamer, the show will also report the results of a public vote for the best game of the past year in several different categories, and is set to feature celebrity appearances and bands.

The bid to find the nation's most skilful videogame adept has been taking place over the past couple of months across the UK; the 'Hunt for the UK's Greatest Gamer' tour was open to anyone, and stopped in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Belfast. Players were randomly allocated three challenges from a possible 12 games, with the overall best player from each city going forward to the final. As **Edge** goes to press, the tour has proved significantly popular. "These are difficult times, yet over 1,000 games players turned out to compete in the London challenge – and the standard was high across the board," claimed Barrington Harvey's **Simon Harvey**.

Voting for the 'Game Stars' People's Choice Awards, meanwhile, took place across the 'Game Stars' Website (www.gamestars.co.uk), the 'Daily Mirror', and at in-store voting forms at GAME. Winners in the ten awards categories will be revealed during the show itself, with the 'Daily Mirror', GamesRadar.com, GAME and BAFTA having sponsored individual awards. The overall Game of Games Award is to be awarded by a BAFTA jury of 'industry experts' apparently.

"In order to take gaming into the mainstream, we need to treat videogaming as a fun pastime, not the obsession of the hardcore"

The show itself will be broadcast on Easter Sunday, with the inclusion of celebrity guests and bands clearly aimed at drawing in a larger audience. And while **Edge** certainly has some doubts about some of the nominees for the awards categories, such a bid to proselytise to the masses about the joys of gaming is entirely admirable. Nevertheless, it's probably still destined for the scorn of some elements within the gaming community, as Harvey admits. "We're not going to keep some of the more cynical gamers happy, but that's not necessarily what 'Game Stars' is all about. It will be interesting to see how they react to it, though."

No doubt there will be resistance to the attempt by the show's producers to 'glamorise' gaming. But Harvey is clear that previous attempts to televise videogames have been hamstrung by a reluctance to properly court a mainstream audience. "Think about our 'stars', they've all originated from gaming and games TV programming. And while a degree of knowledge is obviously crucial when representing games on TV, we have tended to ghettoise our spokespeople by pigeonholing them from the off. But games are obviously becoming increasingly popular; no longer must you be a geek to understand and love them. The reach into celebrity is more widespread than the mainstream media realises. Making a TV show that similarly caters for a mainstream audience is obviously the secret to success. Sure, the hardcore audience has brought the industry to where it is. But in order to truly take gaming into the mainstream, we need to break free from those shackles and treat videogaming as a fun and entertaining pastime, not the obsession of the hardcore."

Such an argument is hardly likely to curry favour with cynical and jaded gamers, but it's clear that the videogame industry has much to gain from a show such as 'Game Stars'. "It is in the best interest of games and gaming to have mainstream TV pick up on the fun and enjoyment they can bring to everyone," explains Harvey. "It will rejuvenate interest in gaming outside of our traditional peak period, much like the music industry promotes itself through the Brits in February, when music CD sales are typically low."

Indeed it's so obvious, you'd be forgiven for wondering why the industry hasn't attempted something similar before. But efforts to get the show off the ground hit an unforeseen obstacle when it was discovered that television footage of videogames is heavily circumscribed by the regulatory body, ITC. "Whereas films and music are deemed to have cultural significance, games coverage falls under 'promotional' material,



Nintendo has certainly taken 'Game Stars' seriously, even going so far as to produce flyers to drum up support, and votes, for its nominated games, such as *Metroid Prime*





so we're restricted in what we can and cannot do on television without breaching its guidelines," explains Harvey. "If we are to move on as an industry, we genuinely need to lobby for that to change." Indeed it's remarkable that the likes of Girls Aloud and One True Voice are perceived to contribute more to the cultural life of the nation than the likes of *Ico* or *Rez*. And it's also remarkable that the industry has been broadly unaware of the ITC's stance until now.

It's certainly something that's going to have to change before videogames can truly gain a foothold on television schedules, but the aim is for 'Game Stars' to become an annual event. "We're hoping that over time, 'Game Stars' will become the equivalent of the Brits in the music industry," continues Harvey. "'Game Stars' is all about embracing the good in games and gaming and we're hoping that after the show, we'll have made more people interested in playing videogames." Which is what **Edge** is hoping for, too.

For more information about 'Game Stars', visit the Website at www.gamestars.co.uk







According to Barrington Harvey's Simon Harvey, one 'high-profile male TV host' rang up the producer to personally ask whether he would be able to give out an award

CUTTINGS



Nintendo goes through torrid spell

Nintendo survived a brief scare last month as two high-profile UK retailers were said to be reconsidering their decision to stock the GameCube. Trade paper, 'MCV', was the first to reveal the news that first Dixons, and then Argos had each decided to offer low-cost GameCube bundles as an exercise in stock clearing after the console had failed to perform over Christmas. Shortly after Dixons announced its decision to sell the GameCube for £99 along with a free game, Argos revealed its offer of a console bundled with a game and a memory card for just £79.

The news quickly prompted fears for the collapse of the console as an ongoing concern in Europe, and speculation regarding the future of the platform. But, no doubt to Nintendo's relief, these price initiatives and the timely launch of *Metroid Prime* gave GameCube sales a substantial fillip. Indeed one week saw UK sales of 14,000 units, eclipsing both Xbox and, surprisingly, PlayStation2, prompting both Dixons and Argos to reassert their support for the platform. When contacted by **Edge**, a Dixons spokesperson reiterated that the company's relationship with Nintendo is "as strong as ever," saying that the company plans to stock the GameCube at a price of £99 for the foreseeable future, with games retailing at £25. Argos has also decided to continue to stock the console.

Nevertheless, Nintendo hardly acquitted itself with aplomb during the episode, and did little to clarify the rumours. Indeed without any evidence from Nintendo to suggest otherwise, it appears that the company did little or nothing to win back the support of the two retailers – which is hardly reassuring to PAL gamers who have already had to put up with delayed release schedules and for whom the fate of the Dreamcast is still a relatively fresh memory. Still, the future of the console seems assured, for now at least.

Nintendo was unavailable for comment as **Edge** went to press.

Games provide focus for Screenplay

Nottingham's Broadway Cinema provides the venue for an exploration of gaming's cultural contribution



Doak lost out to Zak Banson, which just goes to show that developers work so hard they can't play their own games

Last month saw the third annual Screenplay event take place at Nottingham's Broadway Cinema, aimed at investigating the cultural impact of videogames. Entitled 'Makers, Thinkers, Players', the event took place on Saturday, March 15, and was co-organised by Broadway Education and visual artist **Frank Abbott** of Nottingham Trent University, who were hoping to provide a platform for the discussion of issues such as narrative, character, identity, audience, industry and art with regard to videogames. And though it was attended by only around 80 people, there are plans to make next year's event a much more ambitious one.

The highlights of this year's event included a matinee screening of 'War Games', an exhibition of retro consoles and games, and the chance to see David Doak getting roundly beaten at *TimeSplitters2*. "From my point of view the event went very well," explained Abbott, "and it performed the task of bringing together a diverse range of engaged people to explore and celebrate the thinking behind the development of the games phenomenon. The discussion was terrific with relevant and exciting contributions in all areas."

Indeed a panel discussion featured Free Radical Design's David Doak and Professor Steve Benford from the University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Lab, while a retrogame exhibition organised by Ian Pare and Paul Drury allowed attendees to enjoy a range of titles on such platforms as the Atari VCS and the BBC Micro. Also of note was an exhibition of technology-based artwork and virtual reality and simulator machines. And then there was the *TimeSplitters2* tournament, which saw four finalists taking on Doak on a cinema screen. Doak's official excuse for losing out to Zak Banson was that the Xbox controller was too large, though **Edge** did manage to extract an 'off-the-record' confession that he just wasn't good enough on the day.

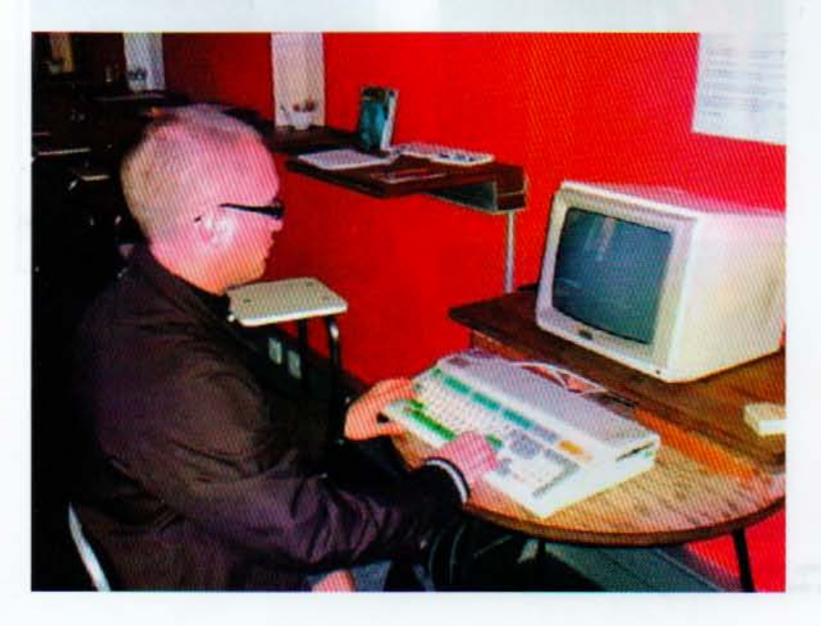


Next year's Screenplay is intended to take place on a larger scale, building on the success of the first three events in bringing together a diverse range of people to discuss gaming

The success of this year's event builds on the previous two events, and the plan is to stage it on a larger scale next year. "We now have links with such a range of committed and engaged people that I think we will be in a position to try and get support for a more ambitious event next year," confirmed Abbott. "I think that Broadway would be interested in seeing this event develop and I know they were pleased by the different range of people it brought into the building."

Certainly it's indicative of a broader trend which has seen conferences springing up to cater for discussion about videogames in a context that's free from commercial constraints – as demonstrated by last issue's report from the Gamehotel event in Paris. Which can only be a good thing, judging by an audience that ranged from experimental research programmes in interactive media, and academic and journalistic critics, to artists and gamers.

Expect **Edge** to bring you news of next year's event nearer the time, but for details about other events at the Broadway Cinema, visit www.broadway.org.uk







Retrogamers were well provided for at Screenplay thanks to Ian Pare and Paul Drury, but there were more contemporary flavours of gaming on display, such as *Rez* (above)

Edinburgh gets a games festival

Plans are afoot for the videogame industry to muscle in on Scotland's annual festival of culture

Given the commercial parity of the videogame industry with other major entertainment sectors, it should come as no surprise that there's a desire to match them culturally as well. Which is why plans are afoot to launch the 2003 Edinburgh International Games Festival during August, to celebrate the cultural importance of videogames alongside theatre, TV, books, and cinema. The EIGF aims to celebrate the creativity exhibited by the medium, as well as offering a platform for developers and publishers to share ideas and convey some of these to the public.

The inaugural one-day event will kick off on the evening of August 17 for VIPs and guest speakers, with the conference proper taking place the following day. It will focus on the potential crossover between videogames and other media, such as film, television and music, as well as the social and educational influence of gaming software. Although the eventual line-up of keynote speeches and sessions has yet to be confirmed, a steering group has been set up with support from Scottish Enterprise, ELSPA and Tiga. Tom Stone, worldwide managing director of LEGO Interactive has been elected as its first chair.



Edge will be supporting the event by providing the shortlist of nominees for the official festival award. The 25 nominated games will be announced at E3 and on **Edge**'s Website, with the eventual winner to be announced during the festival itself, in a special award ceremony, which will take place on Monday, August 18, with an after-show party to follow.

Information about the event will be available shortly on the festival's Website at www.eigf.co.uk



Edge will provide the shortlist for the festival award, with the winner to be announced at the festival on August 18

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Skies of Arcadia Legends	GC	Sega	Overworks	8
Bubble Bobble Old & New	GBA	Empire Interactive	Taito	7
Command & Conquer: Generals	PC	Electronic Arts	EA Pacific	7
Kung Fu Chaos	Xbox	Microsoft	Just Add Monsters	7
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	PC	Ubi Soft	Red Storm Entertainment	7
Devil May Cry 2	PS2	Capcom	In-house	6
Praetorians	PC	Eidos Interactive	Pyro Studios	6
Steel Battalion	Xbox	Microsoft	Capcom	6
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	PS2	Activision	K2	6
The Sims	Xbox, PS2, GC	Electronic Arts	Edge of Reality	6
Unreal II: The Awakening	PC	Atari	Legend Entertainment	5
Vexx	Xbox, PS2, GC	Acclaim	In-house	3



Skies of Arcadia Legends



Rainbow Six: Raven Shield

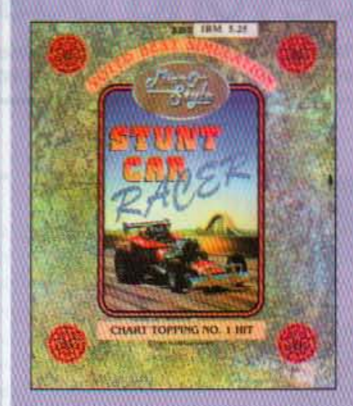


C&C: Generals



Kung Fu Chaos

CUTTINGS



Crammond to resurrect Stunt Car Racer

One of the '80s' most loved titles is set to be resurrected on next-generation consoles next year. **Geoff Crammond**'s *Stunt Car Racer* is finally set to receive a long-awaited sequel. Going under the provisional title of *Stunt Car Racer Pro*, Crammond is aiming for a launch date of 2004, though it has yet to be announced what hardware platforms the game will run on, or even who will be publishing the title. "A sequel or upgrade to *Stunt Car Racer* has been suggested by various thirdparties over the years but I could never agree to anything which didn't have my complete involvement at every level," explained Crammond. "Now, the time seems just about perfect to produce *Stunt Car Racer Pro*."

DTS offers zero fee licence

One of the announcements made at GDC was that audio technology company, DTS is offering a zero fee licence for use of its multi-channel sound technology for PlayStation2 games. The technology has already featured in Rockstar's *GTA: Vice City* and EA's *SSX Tricky*, and allows realtime interactive discrete digital surround sound during actual gameplay. Also at GDC was a demonstration Codemasters' *IndyCar Series* (see **E**122) being run in DTS mode on the DTS booth.

New budget range launched

A new range of PlayStation2 titles is set to launch at the end of April with a price point of £10. The Play It range will initially consist of four titles with 20 titles expected by the end of the year. The first four titles in the range will be *Cel Damage Overdrive*, *Seek & Destroy*, *Play It Pinball* and *Road Trip Adventure*. The games are aimed at an impulse-buying, massmarket audience, and so will be available from a variety of retailers, from supermarkets to videogame specialists. And though it's unlikely to get the average **Edge** reader salivating with excitement, it might be worth keeping an eye on it for the odd bargain.

http://unreal.epicgames.com
www.crytek.com
www.garagegames.com

Beyond pushing polygons

The new generation of game engines focus less on fillrate and more on lateral issues such as art tools, in-game editors and online distribution models





Doing things differently is GarageGames, whose Torque engine is designed and priced to allow independent developers to create simple, episodic-style games which can be distributed via the Internet

Time was when a game engine, conceptually at least, was a relatively straightforward piece of technology. It might have consisted of 100,000 lines of code, but art assets went in one side and a moving 3D world was outputted to some sort of display at the other. In the current mixed-up world of integrated art pipelines and online distributed digital content, though, that's no longer enough. Three examples on show at the Game Developers Conference demonstrate how this increasing diversity plays out.

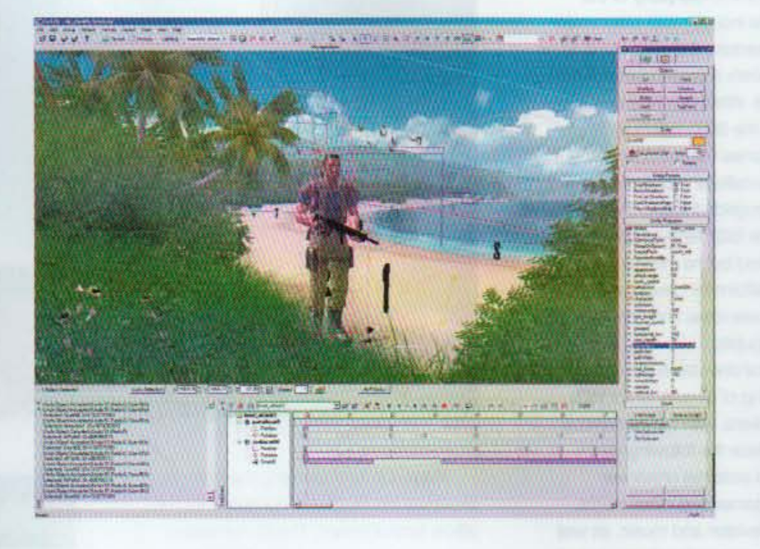
Epic Games' Unreal engine is the most obvious example of how the old-skool approach has changed. After all, it is the most focused and capable first/thirdperson PC game engine available for licensing by developers, even if access costs a steep $500,000 (£319,000).

This year, its demonstrator of choice, level designer **Alan Willard**, surprised attendees to Epic's meeting room with something special even by its high standards. Using a technique known as Spherical Harmonic Mapping, which first came to prominence in a research paper at SIGGRAPH 2002, the company is in the process of refocusing its technology away from pushing more polygons and towards generating more realistic lighting models via its art creation tools.

First demonstrated as a demo for nVidia at the Comdex show, Epic's footage shows a highly detailed *Unreal* character moving within a starkly lit environment. The rub is that the character model consists of only 3,000 polygons – about the same as the characters in Epic's *UT2003* game – while the environment is a mere 2,500.

The trick, according to Willard, is to create two models for every object; one at very high resolution and one low-polygon model. In the nVidia demo, the high-resolution character model was 1.5m polygons, for example. "Once you have both models, you UV map the low-resolution one and then run it through a processing tool, which spits out a spherical harmonic map," Willard explains. This is then mapped onto the low-poly model, giving the incredible detail associated with the high-resolution model while requiring a much smaller processing overhead.

The only problem for current developers is that using this technology will require them to rework their art assets. With this in mind, Epic has taken the decision to give away some of what would have been its *Unreal Warfare* game in a free bonus pack for *UT2003* and concentrate on building new content for the future.





The bonus pack for *UT2003* looks great but that's because it was originally designed for Epic's next game. Its new Unreal engine technology means that it's been released now, so the company can focus on really pushing the boundaries

Realtime editing

A company with a similar technology, if lesser profile, is German developer Crytek. At GDC, it was demonstrating the Polybump package in conjunction with its CryEngine. This also applies detailed textures generated from a high-resolution model, to a low-resolution one. More impressive however was the realtime editing capabilities of the CryEngine.

Demonstrations showed a level editor playing the game within the WYSIWYG editor, CryEdit, pausing the game to drop in objects and enemies, while deforming and retexturing the landscape and then seamlessly returning to the game.

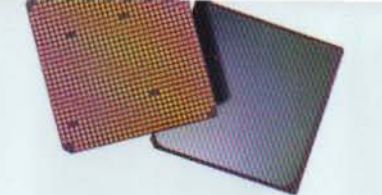
Another engine company at the show was GarageGames. Like CryEdit, its Torque engine allows realtime editing of levels but more importantly the company has a completely different business model backing up its technology. Based loosely on the Tribes 2 engine – GarageGames consists of people who worked at *Tribes* developer Dynamix, a Vivendi-owned studio shut down in 2002 – Torque is designed and priced to enable independent developers to work on innovative and small-scale games.

For example, it costs only $100 (£64) per programmer to license Torque, and already there are several hundred games in development using the system, according to company evangelist **Jay Moore**. "We obviously don't expect all those games to be completed but we expect that in time there will over 100 Torque-powered games available," he predicts. Unsurprisingly, the company works closely with its licensees, and extends its renegade status by strongly supporting the Opensource community, using such software in development and supporting Linux development within Torque as well as Windows and Mac operating systems.

Another feature of GarageGames' model is that it offers developers the opportunity to release games via the Web. Most games using Torque will be made available as small downloads, although Moore says that in time boxed retail titles will also be launched.



German developer Crytek's CryEngine comes complete with a neat realtime level editor, while its Polybump art tool allows artists to create detailed models using only a small number of polygons



www.amd.com

The 64bit question

Forget higher clockspeeds, AMD reckons the next big thing to push PC performance will be its 64bit architecture



Over the past couple of years, clockspeed was the competitive edge by which the CPU market was judged, but it's now suffering from a case of diminishing returns. Intel's jump to a GigaHertz Pentium 4 was exciting, but breaking the subsequent barriers of 2GHz and 3GHz hasn't even inspired the masses to yawn, let alone upgrade their desktops.

Compared to the attitude of the boys in blue, AMD's CPU strategy has becoming increasingly divergent, however. It hasn't driven the clockspeed of its chips as aggressively, for one thing, claiming frequency is no longer a good representation of CPU performance. Instead, it's maintained the illusion of supporting the clockspeed performance paradigm thanks to a cunning branding ploy. It labels chips with a number it says demonstrates performance relative to the equivalent Intel product. Thus AMD's Athlon XP 3000+, while only running at 2.1GHz, is seen as equivalent to the Pentium 4 3.06GHz chip.



The first games to support AMD's 64bit approach on the server side are Valve's *Counter-Strike* and Epic's *UT2003*. Epic is also releasing a consumer version when the Athlon 64 is released

According to senior brand manager **John Crank**, this paradigm will be broken by AMD's new 64bit CPUs. "In many areas, people are running up against the limits of 32bit technology," Crank explains. "Issues such as the amount of addressable memory and compile times make a move to 64bit processing compelling."

But it's not 64bit technology itself which is the key factor. Intel already has its Itanium 64bit solution for the server market, for example. One of the selling points of AMD's approach will be its backwards compatibility with the existing 32bit x86 architecture, which is the basis for the majority of available software.

Flexible friend

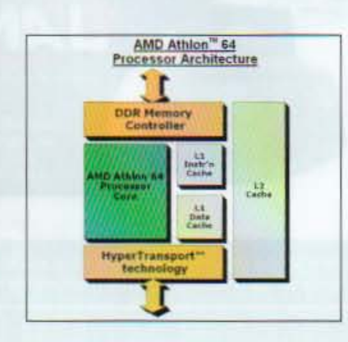
"One key advantage of our approach is users can mix their application bit size," Crank says. "For creatives in the movie industry, for example, this means they can run their Renderman packages at 64bit precision, while keeping the same 32bit frontend. It's a very flexible approach."

AMD's first 64bit product, to be launched on April 22, will be the Opteron processor, which targets the server and workstation markets. Crucially, AMD will also be releasing products based on the same 64bit architecture into the consumer desktop market. Its Athlon 64 range is expected to be available in September.

"There are two main issues that drive mainstream adoption," Crank reckons. "You need to have performance at a pricepoint. Obviously, consumers aren't going to accept a $2,000 (£1,275) CPU, so we will be fitting into the existing pricing model. Also they want to see the performance benefits and we are working with some major developers to demonstrate that."



As well as the standard PC architecture, the Athlon 64 uses AMD's high-speed, point-to-point link HyperTransport technology to connecting integrated circuits on the motherboard





There are two key architectural features of AMD's 64bit processors – both the server version, Opteron, and the desktop version, Athlon 64, are based on the same core and are backwards compatible with existing 32bit x86 software

Gaming bulks up

The most vocal programmer in support of 64bit technology, so far, has been Epic's Tim Sweeney. In a now notorious posting on nerd Website Slashdot, he says the developer runs into the limits of 32bit architecture on a daily basis, most notably the fact it only supports up to 4Gb of addressable RAM.

Proving its support, Epic has already shipped a version of its *UT2003* server for Opteron and will support the desktop release of Athlon 64 with a 64bit client version of the game. Sweeney also says the next-generation Unreal engine will require developers to use 64bit CPUs to author their games.

Another key developer backing 64bit is Valve. It will be supporting the launch of Opteron with a 64bit *Counter-Strike* server. In a straight port of its x86 32bit code, *Counter-Strike*-dedicated server tests with both 32 and 64bit versions revealed a 30 per cent clock-for-clock gain, and is expected to show further performance gains in future upgrades.

"AMD's approach to 64bit computing looked great on paper, and it's nice to see with real processors and development tools it fulfils that promise," says **Gabe Newell**, Valve's managing director. "Every PC developer should be looking to get their server code and development tools running in 64bits right away."

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Lisa's speech almost covers her modesty. Not quite, though. Enjoy it – that's as gratuitous as Edge gets



The Edge line of bikinis, ably demonstrated by the lovely Hitomi. How do they stay on? Only she knows



In fact, the E line of clothing's incredibly popular on Zack island this season. Edge: style over substance



Realising her mistake from the first panel, Lisa gets dressed. Those Es aren't as sharp as they look





Java games on a GBA? Ha! Next thing you know, Nokia will be releasing a games platform! Ha ha ha!

01 Thanks for the mammaries

US: "Just what I expected," says a topless Lisa in the screenshot opposite, the words barely covering her modesty. "Just what **Edge** expected too," agrees **Edge**, wondering how Tecmo is going to react to a nude patch that's far, far more revealing than the *DoA2* one that sent its lawyers into apoplexy all those years ago. Created communally (and inevitably) by a handful of flesh-hungry Xbox hackers, phase one of the patch sets the swimsuits to invisible; phase 2 'injects' new character textures, providing players with an opportunity to see if Kasumi really is a natural redhead. It's a smart technical achievement, but a pretty empty, pathetic experience – those who've experienced the game will know the characters lose their attractiveness in proportion to their clothing. But don't pity the poor teens getting off on this; pity poor Acclaim, whose triple-A, 'XXX' BMX game has just lost its only incentive to purchase.

02 We're JaMID, JaMID, JaMID, JaMI

US: So sang Bob Marley, possibly, and **Edge** hopes you like JaMID too. You probably will; it's a GBA cart developed by Ajile Systems which allows you to run Java-based games on your handheld machine. The cart also comes with a built-in MP3 player, as well as an 8Mb MMC card to store the freeware Java games strewn across the Internet. **Edge** wonders if Java-based shooter *Noiz2* (see **E**122 Website of the Month) is compatible? It'll be a few months before it can find out, because the system's currently only available to developers – and **Edge** can't afford the $199 (£126) for the dev kit thanks to an unwise wager on a horse called Gard's Galleon. A consumer version is expected soon, once enough developers are working on JaMID-specific Java titles. Visit www.jamid.com for more information.

Soundbytes

"Let's put it this way, I'm not holding my breath."
Peter Molyneux comments to BBC News Online on the likelihood of the UK games industry receiving financial assistance from the government

"They don't really look like women they actually look more like aliens, but still hot aliens."
A user on an Xbox hacking messageboard reacts to the screenshots of *DoAX* with nude patch applied

"We're pleased to be working with Ninja Tune on this very exciting project. Hexstatic's futuristic-meets-retro ethos fits perfectly with *Shinobi*'s combination of classic gameplay, contemporary style and target market."
SCEE's vice president of marketing, David Patton, reveals why the company chose to sponsor Hexstatic's upcoming tour

"Frankly, most gamers I have met in the light of day do not possess a wealth of social skills."
BBC News Online's Darren Waters, in a report on Xbox Live

03 Pinball? Wizard!

Austria: Now, ever since it was a young boy, **Edge** played the silver ball. From Soho down to Brighton, it must have played them all. But it hasn't seen anything like this in any amusement hall. That's probably because *this* isn't a ropy old mechanical table, but a shiny 42-inch plasma screen attached to a couple of side flipper switches and a PC capable of running the excellent pinball simulator, *Visual Pinball*. And that's where this system's appeal really lies, because followers of the software will know it's the MAME of the silver sphere, capable of emulating just about every pinball table worth tilting. Sure, you'll lose much of the tactile appeal of pinball, which some would say is the game's real strength – but perhaps that's a small price to pay for every machine ever. Besides, the lack of physical feedback might finally give **Edge** the edge over that damned deaf dumb and blind kid. More information from www.tab.at/English/VirtualPinball.html

04 Rough diamond

Italy: Edge receives some odd artifacts in the post, but 'Spectrum Diamond' ranks as one of the more confounding. Put simply, it's a film that explores the myth of Matthew Smith by juxtaposing interviews featuring his contemporaries and devotees with clips from his games and genuine '80s footage of his Wallasey homeland. This is given a form of coherence by the surreal use of abstract narrative chunks delivered by an ethereal-sounding Finnish child.

It portrays Matthew Smith as the Syd Barrett of the coding world. There is no denying the film has been assembled with artistic flair and has a raw energy only a diet of pasta could fuel. It hypnotically instils no small sense of wonder, and as such represents unmissable viewing for anyone who ever clashed their colours.



Data Stream

Number of FIFPro-endorsed international and club squads in *ISS3*: **90**
Number of club squads in England alone: **92**
Initial release date for PAL *Metal Slug X* in the UK: **April 2002**
Likely release date for PAL *Metal Slug X* in the UK: **April 2003**
Number of minutes of extra cut-scenes in the PlayStation2 version of *Splinter Cell*: **30**
Recently confirmed US launch date of *Halo 2*: **Q1 2004**
Increase in GBA software sales in the UK, the week after the launch of the GBA SP: **183 per cent**
Amount of money raised for Comic Relief by Kuju Entertainment's PC products team on sponsored bug fix: **£758**
Number of bugs fixed during sponsored bug fix: **171**
UK retail Sales of *Championship Manager 4* during its first week on sale: **124,627**
Number of games that have sold faster than *Championship Manager 4*: **2**
Number of units sold globally over the course of the *Championship Manager* series: **3m**



Tab also makes pub quiz machines, not dissimilar to *Erotic Photo Hunt*, **Edge**'s favourite bar machine




But this is substantially more sophisticated than touchscreen '70s porn. And just as fun, hopefully





Children waking up in bathtubs. The Matthew Smith legend gets weirder. And arguably slightly darker


In fact 'Spectrum Diamond' even manages to out weird Smith's appearance on 'Thumb Candy'


Indeed, who'd have thought the man responsible for images such as these might be slightly unbalanced





Who lives in a house like this? Edge isn't sure, but quite fancies the tabletop if there's a house sale



And that *Tempest* machine for that matter. Honestly, it's wasted on them. They don't love it like Edge does



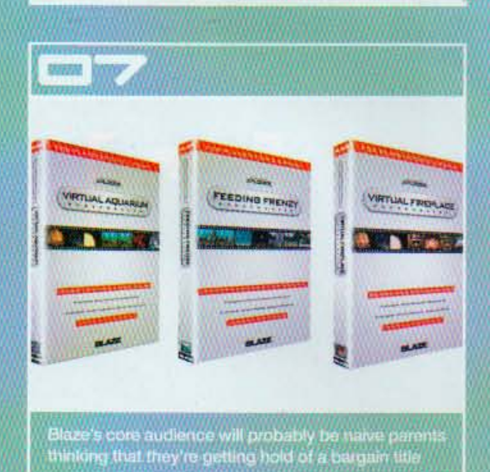
Another one? With rare reflected marquee? Right, this is ridiculous. No wonder ebay prices are so high



Let's go round there and 'liberate' it – play arcade *Robin Hood*. Next stop Archer MacClean's house


Imagine this in your lap. Heaven. Oh, hold on, **Edge** thought it was still captioning the *DoAX* pictures!


But seriously folks, take **Edge**'s wife. No, seriously, take her. You've been a wonderful audience, g'night



Blaze's core audience will probably be naive parents thinking that they're getting hold of a bargain title


But when the results are this pretty, who's going to be disappointed by the fact it's just a screensaver

05 Cover version

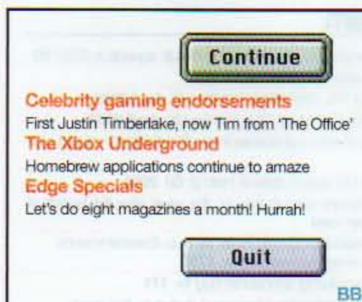
Slovenia: People often ask **Edge**, "Hey **Edge**, if you were a popular videogame, what game would you be?" Well, **Edge** isn't sure – perhaps Mizuguchi-san's glorious *Rez*, since, hey, you either love it or hate it, and, hey, if you hate it you're *hideously* wrong. But **Edge** can answer a similar question – "If the cover of **Retro** #1 was a popular videogame, what game would it be?" – thanks to Tomaz Kac, who's interpreted Gary Lucken's wonderful pixel art using his Head over Heels engine. The game is a simple collect 'em up taking place over a handful of interlinked rooms, but it's free to download and a pleasure to play. Grab it at Lucken's gorgeous Army of Trolls Website, located at www.armyoftrolls.co.uk

06 "The future of gaming has arrived"

UK: Or so the press release claims, anyway. Ideal Out There stories aren't just constructed from fire-chucking lunatics in Japan (see **E**122). No, there's also the Ludicrous Peripheral genre, a favourite of this section since its inception – so much so that there's actually a subgenre within that, the Ludicrous Integrated Keyboard Peripheral genre. And that's precisely where Fanatech's Gameboard Controller belongs, its dual-system compatibility offering PlayStation2 gamers a chance to "enjoy the same degree of control as PC gamers," and PC gamers an opportunity to sample "the same comfort and phenomal [sic] catalogue of games" as their console counterparts. Now, **Edge** doesn't quite understand how the device can impact upon the PC's (already ample) back catalogue, but still, the ironing-board aesthetics are enough to guarantee the hardware its coveted spot in the magazine. The Fanatech Gameboard is out now. Now, what convergent delights can we expect next month? Answers on a postcard…

07 Grate expectations

UK: "When you're not playing on your PlayStation, what do you do?" begins Blaze's press release. If you must know, we're usually out impressing Bath's ladies with our eye-hand coordination. Blaze has a better idea: screensavers. There are three to collect: Virtual Aquarium; Feeding Frenzy (sharks, eagles, piranhas); and **Edge**'s favourite, Virtual Fireplace. To you, £5. Each.





08 Pattern Recognition

Despite his success, it's fair to say that William Gibson doesn't come across as a natural writer. His prose is too clipped, object-oriented, even vertical to convey emotion. In a sense, he's lucky to have chosen technology as his underlying subject matter. It completely suits his lack of dramatic tension, which makes it surprising that 'Pattern Recognition' captures the prevailing zeitgeist like few other books have over the past couple of years. Instead of the jacked-in, cyber-future setting of most of his work, Gibson has reverted to the present. 'No Logo', 9/11, global hegemony, the erosion of the power of the state are all layered into a coherent whole.

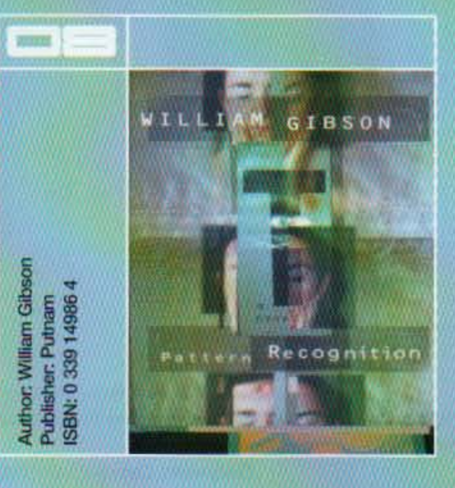
Cayce Pollard, daughter of an eminent US government spook, is allergic to logos. She cuts them off her clothing and can't travel on Virgin Atlantic, but this makes her an ideal marketing consultant. Companies fly her around the world to take one look at their branding. She gives an immediate yes or no and is on her way. Yet as still images from mysterious video footage start to dominate the bandwidth of western consumers, she is sucked into a search from Camden Lock to a warehouse in Moscow, via Shinjuku, Tokyo for its meaning. Yet for all the miles travelled, 'Pattern Recognition', as its title suggests, is less about the ceaseless activity of the characters, more about holding up a mirror to the way we live. Like his friend Douglas Coupland, who is thanked in the credits, Gibson is bringing the postmodern life into sharp focus.

09 A Computer Called LEO

Over the years it's proved easy to portray the UK as a place full of madcap inventors, who ultimately fail to gain the worldwide acclaim and commercial dominance their ideas merit, as if genius and success were somehow inextricably linked. The birth of computing is one such well-worn path. Starting with the proto-embryonic cogs of Babbage's Difference Engine through Turing's abstract Turing Machine to the secret code-breaking Colossus, the role of genius has never been in question. But the role of J Lyons & Co (best known for its genteel Lyons teashops), is one of which few people outside the rarefied climes inhabited by historians of science will have heard.

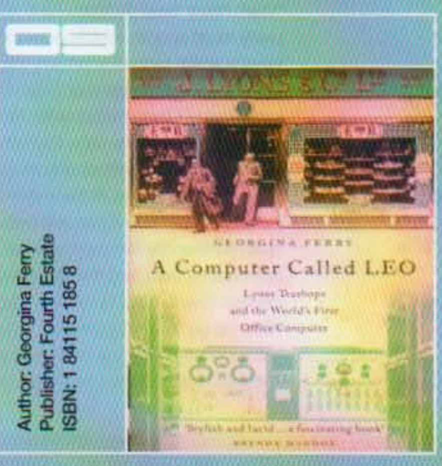
Despite the seemingly mundane nature of Lyons' business, it was one of the best-organised companies in the UK during the 1930s, supplying food to hundreds of cafes on a daily basis. This required a large administrative staff, something that became increasingly expensive in a labour-scarce post-war Britain. As a result, the company developed its own computer. Called LEO, standing for Lyons' Electronic Office, it was the world's first to be used for commercial rather than defence tasks. Two more versions, with total sales numbering over 70, were produced until a government-ordered consolidation of the UK-computer industry saw what had become LEO Computer Ltd lose its identity in what now is a division of Japanese company Fujitsu. Amazingly, however, the last LEO remained in service with the Post Office until 1981. Fascinating stuff.

08



Author: William Gibson
Publisher: Putnam
ISBN: 0 339 14986 4

09



Author: Georgina Ferry
Publisher: Fourth Estate
ISBN: 1 84115 185 8

10



Site: **Hermitgames**
URL: **http://www.hermitgames.com**

10 Website of the month

You can tell a lot about Hermitgames from the links section – Llamasoft, Pompom, Denki, and gamedev.net. It's a development studio that focuses on creating "fun digital things to play with," and so far those things have included three Yaroze titles (*Roller*, *Robot Ron* and *Pingping*), one GBA game (*Sheeparoids*, which is exactly what you think it is), and one for the PC, *Super Mario Pac*. Inspired by a Photoshopped screen from www.uncleclive.co.uk, *Super Mario Pac* is *Jetpac* with the *Super Mario World* tileset, professionally produced and exceptionally entertaining. There's even a high-score competition for those particularly proficient with the 2D FLUDD, with a geek-chic Load Rage T-shirt on offer to the best squirter.

11 Advertainment

Japan: What are the odds? A Zelda GBA advert in the same issue as the Zelda GC review. And look, it's got charming little cute Link puppets. There is a god, after all.



"Here it goes," goes a young voice as our puppet quartet unite their strength, lift a boulder and...



... send it fighting gravity across the screen. "Woah," they shout, "a treasure chest!" "A ruby!" one says.



"It's mine!" they claim. A fight breaks out. Suddenly, "Waaaah, what a monster!" Then, "Oh, a key!"



"*This* is mine!" one begins, his 15-second memory having clearly forgotten about the monster.



They then sing. "Cooperation or not, everything is possible." "Yes, I got it!" says a real-life 'Link'.





It was all in the game, you see? Voiceover: "You can play as you want. A great adventure is awaiting you."





"That is not all: two legends in one single cartridge! *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past & Four Swords*."

Conflict: Desert Storm 2 is, if publisher release dates are to be believed – which they're not, but let's imagine for one briefly naïve second that they are – coming out on August 3. Did the real world ship early or something? Ha-de-ha. Just trying to lighten the mood – it's not like it can get any darker at the moment; at least until the choking black clouds from the burning oilfields block out the sun.

So, hey! While we've all got unlimited electricity to spare, unnecessary consumer goods to purchase, and unconscripted limbs to misuse, let's talk about war's relationship with videogames. The marked difference between Electronic Arts' tedious *Medal of Honor* series and Codemasters' excellent *Operation Flashpoint* is that the first portrays war as a Spielberg film, while the second shows it to be a dirty, lonely, terrifying experience. If you talk to those key to the design and development of the *Medal of Honor* series – and RedEye has, so you don't have to – they will most likely tell you that the decision to omit blood from their game was made because they don't want to exclude people from the experience; that that decision has been born out of responsibility. "Au contraire," replies RedEye, the French lilt sure to antagonise the Hawks. The decision to lose the blood is entirely irresponsible, teaching the children that drive up the sales figures that you can shoot Germans and they'll just go to sleep, and they'll shoot you and you'll do the same. For you, Tommy, ze war is over. Sweet dreams.

Much more responsible is *Operation Flashpoint*, which demonstrates that for every action (gut in the sights, enemy looking the other way, finger on the trigger) there is an equal and opposite and physically repulsive reaction (blood on your hands). No gibs, no chunks, just understated crimson. There is a dull phut-phut when you fire, and a splash of red on your opponent. No gore, no glory, just shaking hands as you fight against your breathing, a sigh of relief as he drops, never seeing his killer. It is not the prettiest game in the world, but nor is it the goriest. Just a simple cluster of red pixels, and sickening relief all round. The first time RedEye saw it, he recoiled. It is sickeningly educational, but kids can't play it. Funny that blood is offensive, adult, but the things that cause the blood aren't.

Crazy world. *Cannon Fodder*'s tagline was "War's Never Been So Much Fun!" and it was pretty much spot on. In *Advance Wars*, which takes a similar cartoon approach, the cutesy commanders challenge each other to matches just to test out their combat skills. As Max's tanks roll over Sami's infantry units, the men go pop-pop-pop under an unstoppable thunderstorm of artillery, and disappear. At the end of the battle, the commanders chat and joke and both live to fight again another day. We don't ever feel we're toying with peoples' lives, and thankfully RedEye's relieved. Gravity is not something that belongs in Nintendo games; *Advance Wars* is too precious to be brought down by real world relativity, so let's imagine Sami's flattened troops get back up, dust themselves off, and head back to their pixel parents in time for tea.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

The opposing sides of war

There was a letter in **E**somethingorother accusing **Edge** of ignoring its responsibilities to its readership by reviewing the original *Conflict: Desert Storm* without discussing whether it's right or not to base a game on a fight so fresh in the memory. RedEye isn't sure who's right here; there's no question that *Conflict*'s a very good game, but equally RedEye isn't entirely comfortable with its premise, and he guesses those who lost loved ones in the Gulf War won't admire SCi's entertaining appropriation of their loss. Releasing a sequel when the world's doing the same seems positively insensitive, but then again, when does it become acceptable to recreate historical atrocities? Do dead people time out after 50 years? *Medal of Honor*'s Spielbergian recreation of World War II might be sanitised and benign, but that doesn't change the fact that we're having fun with the holocaust. And while the parts of the national press fall over themselves in their apoplectic rush to damn games like "Kaboom!: The Suicide Bomber Game" or "Extreme WTC Jumper" they'll run competitions in conjunction with EA to celebrate the release of their latest wargame, even though that game's based on a realistic version of the same principle: killing another human being.

"It will be interesting to see how the press reacts to Conflict: Desert Storm 2, although it might depend on how well the real war goes"

It will be interesting to see how they react to *Conflict: Desert Storm 2*, although RedEye suspects it partially depends on how well the real war goes for the coalition of the willing. It will also depend on other choices developer Pivotal makes. For example, RedEye can't see there being an Iraqi campaign. In the RTS, it's practically a requirement to give you a chance to play as the enemies, but a thirdperson shooter that gives you the chance to play as the enemy – a very real enemy at the moment – and shoot western soldiers in the head is headline material waiting to be written. No matter that their boys are following orders as much as ours; no matter that every twisted body – phut-phut – is built from the same stuff as the person who pulled the trigger on the gun which fired the bullet which tore through the body and twisted it. The difference is good and evil. Or at least what we perceive as good and evil.

Oh, Redeye doesn't know. There's no slick conclusion to this piece, just like there isn't in real life. But there *is* something morally unsettling about recreating historical nastiness purely for present-day thrillz. If EA wants to present its *Medal of Honor* series as an educational experience for all the family then there has to be the visceral ugliness of war as well as the Hollywood glamour, because real people hurt and real people die, and when they do it's not like going to sleep. Losing the blood for the sake of sanitisation is pointless, because kids see worse things than that in the playground – when RedEye was eight, a friend fell off a wall and broke his arm so badly the bone stuck through the skin, jut of splintered white, torn pink, and a pool of red. There is a difference between gratuitous violence and the necessary realism we need to grow.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

We are all guilty, sometimes, of treating 'videogaming' as though it were a homogenous activity, understandable in general terms regardless of specific context. But of course this is not really true. Videogaming means something slightly different depending on whether you are doing it in an arcade, a chip shop, a cybercafe, at home, or in the park. And it's the last possibility that often gets short theoretical shrift: the nature of handheld gaming.

Start with the sleek, silver GBA SP – which, after all, is where Nintendo itself should have started last year. The slightly retro plastic curves of the original GBA are replaced by something which really looks like a desirable piece of consumer electronics. Its clam shell form factor may remind veterans of the flip-lid dual-screen Game & Watches of the early-'80s, but it must also be taken as a direct challenge to Sony, resembling as it does one of that companies' effortlessly desirable Clié palmtops. To flip open a sparkly new GBA SP on the train is no longer to make a bold statement along the lines of, "I'm going to play with a toy right now." For all the average non-gaming commuter suspects, you might be doing sales analysis with a portable spreadsheet program. (That is, as long as you have forked out for the cynically separate headphone adaptor.) One could argue that we shouldn't need to be embarrassed by gaming, that such cosmetic subterfuge ought not to be necessary, but this sea-change in hardware styling is more in the way of a belated acknowledgment that games have become an ordinary massmarket consumer industry, and not just an obsession for stunted adolescents.

That the GBA now has a functional screen, something which ordinarily might be considered a sine qua non for a successful handheld console, has brought me back to the timewarping opiate delights of *Advance Wars*, my favourite game on any format of last year, and also enabled a blissful immersion in *A Link to the Past*, which although largely a port of an old SNES game seems very close to one kind of handheld perfection. The character and environment design combine seemingly incompatible opposites: epic scale with delicious, loving characterisation, and complexity with clean and simple lines, the latter being especially important for our optical health; if staring at a 28-inch cathode-ray tube for hours is bad for the eyes, so much more so is peering at a two-and-a-half-inch LCD.

But it seems reasonable to demand that a handheld game, above all, fit itself easily around the gamer's other activities, and *LttP*'s lack of a save-anywhere option, although historically true to the beat-the-dungeon-in-one-go nature of the series, fails to accomplish this obligation. It has a Sleep mode, but this is still battery-eating, and especially on the new rechargeable GBA SP may not preserve your gamestate for the kind of long hiatus that may be required by any ordinary emergency or responsibility of everyday life. When you sit down in front of a console with many videogames, you implicitly agree to a contract of a few hours' interaction, but a device that is designed to be used on the move cannot demand such a commitment.

Phenomenologically, and as remains true with the GBA SP, handheld gaming has always been a kind of rebellion, a rejection of the environment, a solipsistic insistence on immersing oneself in a fantasy environment regardless of one's physical surroundings. In that sense, it is like reading a novel, a socially acceptable form of such mental selfishness, and perhaps has pleasurable echoes of deceiving teachers at school by doing something other than paying attention to the blackboard. (Sneakily playing *Snoopy Tennis* during maths classes when I was ten had the same insolent function as surreptitiously leafing through the new '2000AD' under my desk.)

But newer developments in gaming on the move seek to change this relationship with the outside world so that virtual reality becomes a form of augmented reality. This is a process that arguably started with the invention of the Sony Walkman: your daily environment reimagined and recontextualised through music. Belgian company It's Alive, for one (www.itsalive.com), is experimenting with games on mobile phones that use the location-tracking and mapping functions of cellular networks to provide a kind of multi-user dungeon whose environment is the streets of your actual city.

We hear a lot of noise about the explosion in mobile-phone gaming that is apparently forever just around the corner, but It's Alive shows that it's not about playing old arcade ports on your Samsung but about community and connection, even with ageing technology – its *Botfighters* game, which is a bit like paintball using SMS texting, recently launched in Russia and had users sending 3m SMS messages within six weeks. So convergence, long hyped but never seen in many parts of the digital industry, may finally be happening with handheld devices. Nokia's N-Gage gaming phone is a hideously ugly and overpriced piece of design, but it's a telling statement of intent. If Sony ever launches its much-rumoured handheld, meanwhile, it would be surprising if the unit's capabilities were not informed by the company's business in handheld computers.

And Microsoft's PocketPC handheld format, too, is finding favour with small videogame developers. This month I bought a Dell Axim, partly as one of my regular and inevitably doomed attempts to organise my life in a more professional manner, but really so I could play chess with *PocketGrandmaster* and muck about with grooves on soft-synth application *Griff Music Studio*. Then I discovered that Jeff Minter's ageless classic *Deflex* is available on the machine for a mere fiver; there is a remarkably slick and fun RTS called *Strategic Assault* available from handango.com; and other garage codeshops are busy writing everything from text adventures to C64 emulators for the system. Something like this device seems to be the way things are going; and of course it looks even more 'normal' in public than Nintendo's redesigned machine.

For many years now, videogaming has been a normal choice of living-room entertainment; and the emergence of convergent handheld devices will extend this spur-of-the-moment option to people on the move. The GBA SP, in fact, may well be the last dedicated, non-networked portable videogame console we shall ever see. It's nice, Nintendo, but it's not the future.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Handheld gamers are learning to be less 'selfish'

"It's Alive shows that mobile-phone gaming is not about playing old arcade ports on your Samsung, but about community and connection"

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

S o, *are* you intellectually challenged?" That was how TalkSport's **Mike Dicken** opened his questioning to Capcom's Ben LeRougetel, when we went on air to discuss the release of *Resident Evil Zero*. This was no surprise – the evening before we were due to appear, James Whale promoted the show by stating that the creator of the most "horrific videogame ever released" would be interviewed the following day, a billing more suitable for a chat with Presto Studios' *Whacked!* team than a chap representing the scary but not overly-gory *Resident Evil Zero*.

This kind of attitude is unique to gaming. Can you imagine an interviewer opening with such an ill-informed and aggressive line of questioning to anyone representing other forms of entertainment? It's unlikely. Chris Martin: "Man, you're dull." Susannah

We're an easy target; a social minority. You can't crack a joke about someone's colour, origin or sexual persuasion (despite some of them being very, very funny) without some organisation taking to the streets. So how comes gamers get treated worse than gays?

Of course, as an industry, we're often guilty of self-deprecation. And sometimes our attempts to get noticed can spectacularly backfire. Geeks changing their names for £500 may make a quirky news story, but does it really do anything to further the perception of the pastime?

The reason there is such clamour for publicity is because we're often dismissed and marginalised by the mainstream media. The dedicated columns in the tabloids and broadsheets are naturally most welcome but their column inches are disproportionate to the

But like the invading Vikings, we will eventually triumph – if not through persuasion then by sheer breeding. One day my kids will have kids – and they'll play videogames with their grandfather who will obviously kick their lily-white bottoms at whatever game they choose. Christmas Days will be spent not passively vegetating in front of the box, but competing as families in games of pure skill.

I've worked in PR for close to nine years. Before that I was a journalist, before that a printer, before that a boy. Throughout this time I've remained a keen games player, much to the chagrin of my parents. I was once told by a friend's mum I'd never get a job by playing computer games; this from the mouth of a woman whose job it was to have kids. The difference is, my hobby was sitting on my arse, not lying on my back.



The Byronic Man

Simon Byron, director, Barrington Harvey

It's time for the geeks to inherit the Earth

Constantine: "Nice clothes can do nothing about your face." Catherine Zeta Jones: "Why don't you just fuck off?" Despite games being never more popular, they remain, in the eyes of the mainstream, a dangerous, corrupting medium, which it is happy to denounce despite not knowing one jot about it.

We've been here before, of course. Rock and roll, video nasties, rap music... surely the oldies must be surprised there's actually a generation of thirtysomethings and under, so convinced were they that we'd cuss, shoot, stab and do sex ourselves out of existence. Sure, every form of entertainment has survived such criticism. But none has sustained it for as long as the videogames industry.

Even the BBC recently got in on the act, with a one of its journalists endearing himself to gamers by claiming, "Frankly, most gamers I have met do not possess a wealth of social skills." This is no better than our TalkSport jock – media lies designed to entertain rather than make a point, as he proved with a subsequent line, "I came across two online friends of mine recently, who live in different cities, chatting to each other over Xbox Live while watching football on television." Friends with no social skills – not quite how the dictionary defines.

comparative size and revenue of the other more accepted forms of entertainment. And while cinema and music are equally pigeonholed into respective news and reviews columns, they often break out into 'proper' news. So if Robbie Williams' last record deal was apparently of interest, how comes the Stamper brothers were not equally lauded?

The ITV 'Game Stars' project – which I've been working on – is a quest to find the nation's best gamer, but do you see speculation about the entrants in the tawdry gossip columns? Granada recognises the value of videogaming – and its support has been invaluable – but others in the media refuse to take the challenge seriously, seeing it simply as a bunch of geeks huddled over consoles, playing with digitised girls instead of the real thing. The reaction has been interesting. Seriously, if a competition to find a s-s-s-stuttering karaoke singer is considered far more important than a genuine competition of skill, then we've a long way to go.

"I was once told by a friend's mum I'd never get a job by playing games; this from the mouth of a woman whose job it was to have kids"

But in truth, we're all in PR to a certain degree. Rarely do we present things as they are, in 100 per cent unadulterated, purest truth. Brush the hair; a quick dab of gel. Smart clothes for going out, shorts and socks for slobbing round the house. It's all about image. We're all representatives of the videogames industry now: walking, breathing, talking advocates of our chosen pastime. We're responsible for forging our image – an image that up until now has been stuck in the past. Emerge from those shadows and into the light. If we're called geeks, then that's what we are. It's nothing to be ashamed of any more.

There are millions of gamers in the UK. Billions worldwide. We should be dismissed and defamed at their peril. The BBC should be bombarded with emails. People like Mike Dicken should be educated or silenced. It's time for the geeks to inherit the Earth.

A monthly column by the Byronic Man can be found in 'Develop' magazine

A curious thing happened to me recently while playing through *Medal of Honor Frontline* for the second time. I've always enjoyed a good war, see. Indeed, there was a time in my life when I'd have gladly poured wine down the back of peace protestors' collars, mocked Greenham Common lesbians with derisive robotic dancing, or lobbed eggs at passing Greenpeace ships. What gives them the right to try and deprive us, the licence fee payer, of a good TV war?

I don't know whether it was due to the looming real-life conflict in Iraq, or a sudden leap-frogging of some adolescent hangover, or reading that EA was set to capitalise on yet another theatre of war – the campaign in the Pacific – for its next *Medal of Honor* game. But whatever it was, that invisible, metaphorical barrier that has always separated me from the realities of conflict suddenly fell away. It was somewhere halfway through the climactic Arnhem level that this profound thing happened. Suddenly, what I'd previously regarded as one of my favourite shooters of the past year ceased to be as fun, and actually struck me as a little sick and exploitative.

Apparently, the game's designers toyed with including blood in the game, but ultimately ruled against it. Why? Presumably, to lower the age rating, maximising potential sales. Given the lengths EA went to in order to create a realistic setting, and stress the heroism of real WWII soldiers, dismissing the horrors of war seemed to me an injustice.

Imagine if the opening scenes of 'Saving Private Ryan' had done away with the gore to ensure a 12 rating. Aside from the glib comedy of bloodless limbs flying left and right, and the need for broad pratfalls to play up injury (ideally accompanied by hilarious sound effects generated by a Swanee whistle and kazoo), there would have been a public outcry. The radical rent-a-causes would've been hammering on the doors of Spielberg's mansion, demanding to yank that beard right off his stupid face.

Yet because 'Ryan' was as honest in its portrayal of D-Day as it actually was – refusing to tone down the starkness of blown-off faces and fear-induced vomiting – it was rightly heralded a masterpiece. The *Medal of Honor* franchise is one of those rare occasions when a game would be improved, out of duty and respect if nothing else, to be as bloody and realistic as possible.

Yet, the game proved enough of a tease that it drove me to learn more. In the days following my politically-correct conversion I ended up buying the 'Band of Brothers' DVD box-set, spent over £30 on books about D-Day, and bothered passing pensioners to relate their own tales of how they bayoneted German teens for spilling their pint (of blood). My interest opened my eyes to hitherto unsuspected levels of heroism, and gob-smacking, individual tales of adventure and bravery.

Bravery such as the exploits of Sergeant Harrison Summers, a US paratrooper, whose actions in the early hours of June 6, 1944 read like a design document for the next *Serious Sam* game. Firing from his hip as he went, Summers single-handedly stormed farmhouse after farmhouse, killing dozens of German troops. It was the sort of thing you might find in a *Medal of Honor* game, only with more blood. And fewer health pick-ups.

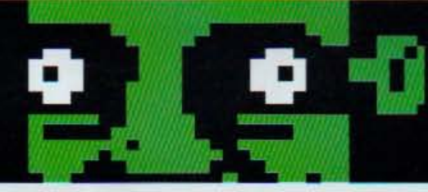
As I continued to investigate, the less I appreciated *Medal of Honor*. It was what it didn't show, more than what it did, that fuelled my curiosity. Too much of those games is lifted from 'Saving Private Ryan' and – in the case of *Spearhead* – 'Band of Brothers'. They would have benefited greatly if the designers had put those productions to one side, and extended their research beyond the aisles of Blockbuster. Instead of aping Mr Spielberg's work, they had the potential to expand beyond the confines of the TV and cinema screens.

But before this becomes a belated review, I'd like to stress – faults or not – that *Medal of Honor* highlights for me the fact that games have the potential to become worthwhile and legitimate historical archives. Sort of. While at present game designers may not be bold enough to tackle reality without filtering it through a Hollywood gauze, the time can't be far away when reviews herald a game for its "bold recreation of the horrors of war," rather than bemoaning that it has "too many save points."

Imagine a genuinely interactive equivalent of 'Saving Private Ryan'. Imagine fighting your way through a ruined French hamlet – not shoe-horned along a pre-determined route by a designer's whim, and prescriptive AI – but having to tackle an evolving situation head-on, in the same way real soldiers had to back in 1944. Imagine the confusion and terror of your comrades dropping around you, their heads popping away into crimson mist. Imagine being pinned down, too terrified to reload your rifle for fear of alerting the enemy to your presence. We have the technology – all it takes is courage, and some focus.

The *MoH* games came close to evoking such situations with their 'Ryan'-influenced Omaha beach stages, but reverted to firstperson shoot 'em up cliché for much of the remainder. Given that Spielberg hasn't yet produced a project set in the Pacific Rim, there is hope that *MoH: Rising Sun* may offer some more originality. And yet, it's likely to only be as bloody as an episode of the 'Tweenies'.

While there's something distasteful about allowing a 12-year-old to watch a PG-rated Bond film – whose only lesson is that women are there to be shagged then fed to sharks, and that smashing each other in the mouth with bottles is acceptable – if they were curious about the war, I'd gladly let one watch the 15-rated 'Saving Private Ryan'. You want to know what war was like? Well here you go, sonny. And don't tell your parent or guardian.



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Okay class, turn on your PS2s and turn to level five

"Medal of Honor highlights for me the fact that games have the potential to become worthwhile and legitimate historical archives. Sort of"

Perversely, I'd be much less open about letting them play the 15-rated *MoH* games. Although positioned as interactive spin-offs of Spielberg's war films, they're closer in many respects to Bond. There are no moral lessons in *MoH*, just the implication that violence lacks consequences.

Assuming that the games industry wants to be perceived as more than a feeding trough for humanity's lowest common denominator, it's going to have to try a little bit harder. Sticking some pretentious quote about the horrors of war at the front of a game that effectively celebrates those same horrors simply isn't enough.

Right. Moral sermon over. I'm off to draw willies on the door of the local vicarage, and post some dog dirt to Amnesty International. Who's with me?

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

prescreen

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Far Cry

Even the rudimentary framework **Edge** has experienced suggests that *Far Cry* will deliver some good old back-to-basics fun. E3 will reveal all.



(PC) Ubi Soft

Amped 2

Amped has now displaced *1080°* as **Edge**'s favourite snowboarding title. Its follow-up doesn't seem to offer much innovation but we remain keen nonetheless.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Starsky & Hutch

Without wishing to heap too much expectation on a game that may yet turn out to be a dud, preview demos of the TV tie-in are just really good fun.



(Xbox, PC, PS2) Empire Interactive

Jak and Daxter 2

With all the talk of a darker tone, etc, **Edge** is just hoping that Naughty Dog doesn't throw the baby out with the bath water. But we're fairly sure it won't.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

The bigger picture

Photorealism and political videogames

So Capcom has decided to include French actor Jean Reno in *Onimusha 3* (or his likeness at least). Partly, it's a bid to court western audiences, reflecting the need for videogames to attract a global audience if they are to make a satisfactory financial profit. But it also reflects the fact that, in spite of the cel-shading bandwagon, the urge towards photorealism remains a strong one in the videogame industry. Judging by screenshots of the game, it would appear that videogame technology finally does allow some semblance of realism – indeed Capcom has proved to be a particularly adept proponent, having resurrected a dead actor for the previous instalment of *Onimusha*.

But it's interesting to note that the US journalists assembled in Japan to attend the announcement of Reno's starring role greeted the news with disdain. Apparently they were affronted by the fact that a French actor had been chosen above a Hollywood celebrity. Maybe it's a little tenuous to infer from this that, as the industry moves towards ever more convincing depictions of reality, videogames are acquiring an even greater capacity to excite political or national feeling. But it's still an issue worth considering.

Because the humble videogame is already a politically charged medium. Quite apart from Web games that depict John Prescott being pelted with eggs and their ilk, videogames have already been utilised by the US army to recruit its troops, and they have also been tailored to the polemical purposes of those with views to express about the Israel-Palestine conflict, or even the Falklands War. But what exactly are the implications of – for example's sake – a sequel to *Conflict: Desert Storm* that featured the realistic likeness of Saddam Hussein? How far does photorealism enlarge the scope of videogames as a politically subversive medium?

Edge doesn't have any concrete answer. Indeed it's a struggle simply to fully grasp the ramifications of the current global political situation for the way in which videogame subject matter is chosen and presented. But as the capacity of videogames to depict reality increases, particularly against a backdrop of geopolitical stress, it's clear that some tough questions are going to be asked of videogames in the future. And the industry had better have some answers; it's going to need to grow up fast and tread carefully.





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035





038

Onimusha 3

Capcom has announced the third game in a multi-million selling series? Well, colour Edge surprised, and say bonjour to Onimusha 3...

The news that Capcom has announced *Onimusha 3* on PS2 won't come as a surprise to many; indeed, it doesn't take a genius to work out that, in the face of a collapsing videogame market in Japan, the company would be considering the future of one of its remaining major franchises. Keiji Inafune, head of Capcom Production Studio #2, brought the first two episodes into the coveted members club of million sellers thanks mainly to the lush 3D backgrounds, and the use of famous actors as the lead character. So, with speculation at a peak, Capcom has given some details for what ought to be the last *Onimusha* on PS2, the company's development rumoured to be soon shifting to PlayStation3.

"The new star is a celebrity, this time somewhat more well known in the west. Jean Reno, star of 'Leon', will play Jacques Blanc"

In fact, Inafune-san has made pertinent comments about the state of the game industry. With sales in decline, he declared that, while he was happy both episodes reached the million mark, serious changes would have to be made in the light of today's players' expectations and the importance of succeeding in the US market. And with that in mind, a video of the game has been shown early on in the development cycle. Curiously, this isn't the CG of the opening sequence like the first footage from the first two *Onimushas*, but instead some in-game sequences and CG movies.

The move to Paris adds an intriguing dimension to the narrative, but US/French relations aren't exactly at their highest point right now, so there's no guarantee that it will be successful in courting a US audience

One particularly long movie shows demons raining down on present-day Paris, setting the French capital alight, the French army failing to fight off the airborne threat. The choice of today's Paris as a location is intended to appeal to a wider overseas audience, and also to overcome the limitations of Japanese medieval theatre (Sengoku). The plot behind the game has been written once again by Flagship, and the title of the game – *Onimusha 3*, obviously – is explained with the reappearance of Takeshi Kaneshiro, Akechi Samanosuke from the original *Onimusha*.

The Japanese actor was also the star of a successful Japanese science-fiction movie 'Returner', which was directed by Takashi Yamazaki, the very same man who is now in charge of *Onimusha 3*'s visuals – movies, stunts and so on. Capcom used the same method of getting film directors in for *Clock Tower 3*, and Yamazaki-san will be cooperating with CG specialists Robot on the footage. Robot's CEO and the producer of the *Onimusha* movies, Mikitaka Kurazawa, has indicated that the company is working again on new motion-capture technologies which allow the capture of several actors' motions at the same time.

The action sequences are designed by a star from Hong Kong, Donnie Yen, who designed all the action sequences for the film 'Blade II'. His role in the game's development is more than superficial, though, as he's been providing precious advice on what kind of sword action is currently in vogue for slash fanatics. As well as commenting on fighting trends, he's directing the motion-capture process, which is taking place in a huge room rigged up to handle wire-based acrobatics.

Another new artistic technique will be used for the game's cut-scenes; the backgrounds won't be simple 3D renders, but a mixture of 3D elements whose movement has been captured by moving them around inside real set models, apparently as big as anything Hollywood produces. Clearly Capcom is lavishing a lot of time (and money) on making the CG stunning, although whether this is the right direction for an interactive medium is open to debate.

Still, another surprise comes with the game's characters. That Kaneshiro-san has



returned was surprise enough, but he was not alone. And, as always with the *Onimusha* series, the new star is a celebrity, this time somewhat more well known in the west. Jean Reno, star of 'Leon', will play Jacques Blanc, a French army officer trapped in medieval Japan while Samanosuke-san fights the demons in modern-day France. Monsieur Blanc acquires a mystical glove which lets him use a magical whip in combination with his modern ballistic weapons. Eventually, the two meet and fight side by side.

In addition, the game is now in full 3D, answering critics who have long claimed that Capcom's reliance on prerendered backdrops is outdated. These backgrounds are very good quality but consequently there's been some loss of quality for character models. Still, the benefit is clear in the sweeping camera movements; the freedom has evidently



Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2004**

provided Yamazaki-san with an opportunity to introduce cinematic effects and visuals.

However, the choices made by Inafune-san don't come without downsides. The decision to use France and Jean Reno, along with the focus on overblown CG, seems like a typical example of Japan misunderstanding the overseas market. And, since the market is mainly focused on the US, another actor or celebrity would have been more logical: despite the critical success of 'Leon', Jean Reno simply isn't that famous in the US. Some of the American people present at the demonstration were clearly (and sadly, along with many more insulting adjectives) upset about the choice of France as a location, and Inafune-san's attempts to bring something new to the genre – racing sections were hinted at – may go unappreciated in the States.









Jean Reno isn't a time-travelling novice, having experienced it in 'Les Visiteurs', but this is, as far as Edge knows, his first videogame appearance

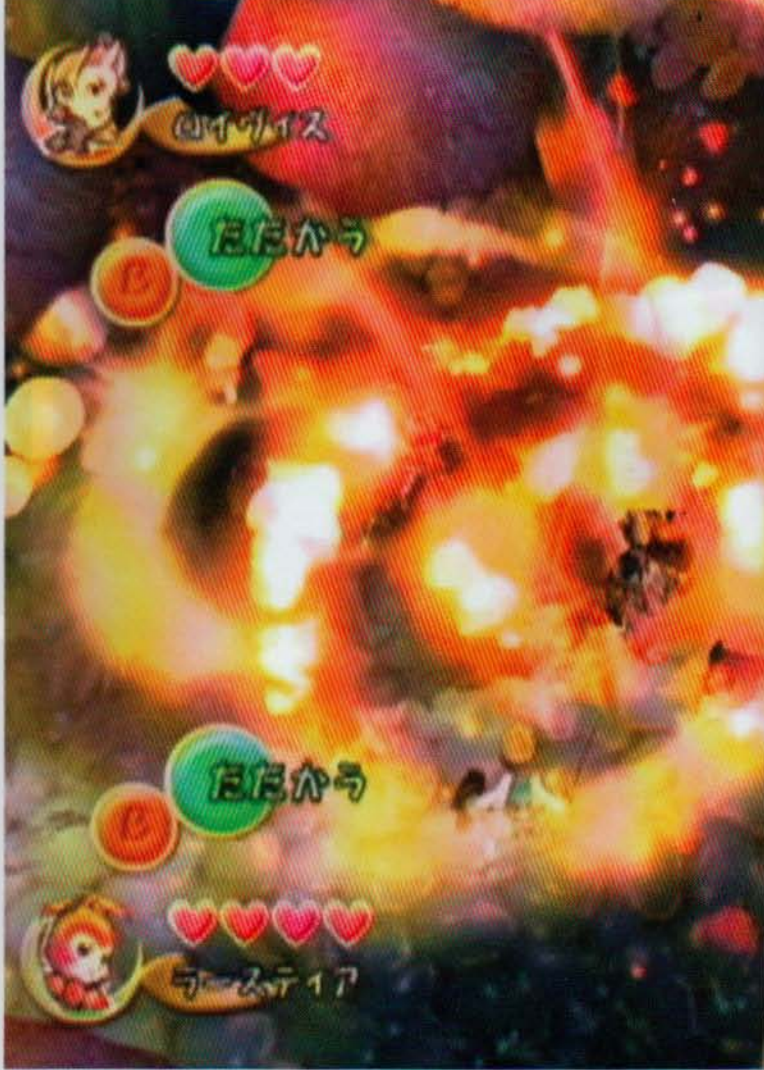
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicle



Has there ever been a less appropriate name for a series than Final Fantasy? Here comes another...



Crystal Chronicle is clearly optimised to take advantage of the GameCube functionality, featuring *Zelda*-like onscreen button menus and various modes and tricks that take advantage of the GBA link-up capacity



With release schedules packed until the end of March, Nintendo has decided to push back *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicle* until after the end of the fiscal year. Because of the delay, designed to maximise sales, Square is still reluctant to reveal too much about the game, but it has issued some basic details.

Players will have the choice of four different races, each in male and female variations, although it's not yet clear if you can choose your character in the central solo quest mode. Before the adventure – and possibly during – you can personalise your hero by changing their costume and accessories. The gameworld is somewhat like that of *Phantasy Star Online* – variously-sized arenas are linked by short canyon style passages. Combat is turn-based, with each character's speed defining the time it takes for their action bar to recharge.

"One thing that's not clear is how important the GBA is, whether it's essential, or simply preferable in order to enable extra features"



Of course, it wouldn't be a Square title (or, as is looking likely, a Square-Enix title) without a substantial emphasis on narrative exposition

After a battle some enemies leave behind items, and of particular interest are the magic stones, which can be collected and stored on a Game Boy Advance. Each stone allows the player to access one kind of magic attack or action, and the GBA stones and effects can be combined to create new powers. For example, a fireball attack may be upgraded to target multiple enemies at the same time, strike a wide area or simply be made more powerful.

It seems that the power from the stones will drain each time they're used, so collecting as many as possible is vital. The power used for each cast can be set, but casting more powerful spells takes longer, and characters will be vulnerable while they're casting, hence protection from the other members of the party is extremely important.

One thing that's not clear is just how important the GBA is, whether it's essential, or simply preferable in order to enable extra features. Anyway, some of those features have been revealed. It will provide access to a radar in fourplayer mode, and a letter system in the quest where you can receive messages from characters and reply to them.

The Moogles (some of the more popular characters from the series, possibly second only to the Chocobo) retain their positions as in-game postmen. Messages may give access to simple quests; for example, you might get a letter from a sick family member, who needs a special herb to cure them.

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Square**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Spring**

Previously in **E**118











Crystal Chronicle also contains puzzle-solving elements, which (for the moment, at least) are simple – take a 'field device' to a mechanism that requires it and a door opens. Stages finish with bosses, and defeating them provides access to The Tree of Miraru, where players can collect some of its essence. This is needed to protect your hometown, and the supply is running out, hence your party's adventure in the Crystal Caravan.

All of this is revealed in the opening movie, which, astonishingly for Square, isn't CG, but still looks excellent. The game also has its own official theme song – 'Kazenoa' by Yae, a proto-starlet in Japan.

The game appears to be centred on a more level-based structure than previous *Final Fantasy* titles, but there should be enough continuities to keep devotees happy – like the Moogles, who return as postmen

Viewtiful Joe

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Spring (Japan), October (UK)

Previously in E118

Capcom helps **Edge** through the first few levels of its idiosyncratic side scroller. And it's looking pretty magnificent

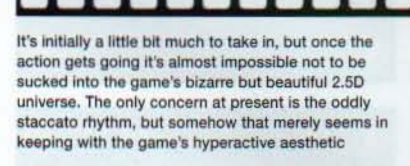













It's initially a little bit much to take in, but once the action gets going it's almost impossible not to be sucked into the game's bizarre but beautiful 2.5D universe. The only concern at present is the oddly staccato rhythm, but somehow that merely seems in keeping with the game's hyperactive aesthetic

First, a caveat: it's simply impossible for screenshots to do full, demented justice to *Viewtiful Joe*. While the essence of the game's scratchy visual style is undeniably intact in the images you see here, any static depiction is going to fail to convey the actual, singular, splendour of the thing. It's not just a question of the way in which primary colours and riotous designs are given hyperactive, hyper-kinetic motion. There's also the auditory assault of a histrionic soundtrack, and the way the camera swims in and out to focus on your heroics when appropriate. Nevertheless, even screenshots manage to convey some sense of the game's unique approach.

In this, if anything, it's a title that would be (marginally) more comprehensible had it emerged from the likes of Treasure. Capcom is in serious danger here of losing the reputation for release schedule conservatism that it's managed to acquire over the years by unleashing successive iterations of successful franchises. The comparison is an apposite one in another respect though. There are actually certain structural similarities with a title such as *Gunstar Heroes*; scroll along dispatching rank and file attackers before the action's punctuated by a mini-boss, requiring the use of a specific technique, before more rank and file get in the way of the next mini-boss, until the level reaches its climax with an actual boss.

Over the course of the first level, new powers are acquired by beating some of these mini-bosses, and introduced with quick tutorials. Responding to onscreen cues, it's possible to dodge attacks, leaving enemies stunned and prone to a destructive counterattack, while the slow down/speed up abilities are handled sublimely, drawing the camera in and allowing even the speediest foes to be taken out. And all the while, the game's two and a half dimensions are enhanced by the twisted offspring of parallax scrolling.

One of the most surprising things about the game is the fact that it's actually pretty tough to play. First there's the sheer amount going on onscreen, which is initially difficult to adjust to, but there's also the need for a fairly old-skool standard of dexterity. And it will be interesting to see how players cope with the cerebral-*ish* challenges that pop up fairly frequently. But in spite of this, it's still an enormous amount of fun to play, and the signs are good that all this originality won't come at the price of quality.

PlanetSide

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Sony Online Entertainment**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

Sony's Online Entertainment groups want to fuse the disparate world of the firstperson shooter and the massively multiplayer RPG. Can it possibly work?

The roleplaying element is one that seems less and less important to Sony's embryonic genre hybrid, *PlanetSide*. Having dropped elements such as 'personal apartments', *PlanetSide*'s persistent characters now revolve totally around combat. But, as **Edge** discovered in recent 4am sessions of Sony's massively multiplayer online shooter, this tighter focus is no bad thing.

PlanetSide is one of those rare games that manages be incredibly ambitious in its brief, while still seeming practicable and straightforward in play. At first sight, *PlanetSide* is a firstperson shooter, albeit featuring hundreds of players. These players fight under the banner of three opposing factions who are each struggling for domination of a number of large islands. The islands contain bases and each faction vies for control of those bases. If you die, then you respawn in a facility controlled by your faction. It's like a game of *Battlefield 1942*, only set in the future and on a vast scale. A straight-up shooter, then? Well, no...

What's significantly different is the way in which these elements are executed. *PlanetSide* marries the dynamic of large numbers of players on one server, as found in *Dark Age of Camelot* and *EverQuest*, with realtime action. No turn-based combat here – this is a firstperson shooter, but one that features vast maps and battles that might involve scores of individual players. It's a persistent world, too, so the same battle might be raging after several weeks and player-characters can be developed over time, rounding them out in equipment and skills as their experience increases. There are special abilities for the troopers, and an array of vehicles. To get to use the best kit, you'll have to prove yourself in war.

The real reward, however, will be the success of winning battles as a member of a vast team. Individuals and squads will have to work together to capture the strings of bases across and island. These installations range from small, easily captured towers, to large multi-function bases that will give a team extra advantages. The fact that large bases must be 'refuelled' also gives the battle a 'siege and resupply' dynamic, leading to furious close-quarters combat and extravagant wilderness ambush tactics.

Whether Sony will be able to deal with the connectivity issues related to having hundreds of people on its servers, and therefore pacify the connection-obsessed PC gaming hardcore, remains to be seen. More significantly the question of whether *PlanetSide*'s persistent world dynamic will be enough of a draw to pull in subscribing punters is a crucial test of where the future of online PC gaming lies. But from **Edge**'s position on the battlefield, it's looking pretty promising.







Vehicles are essential to getting about in the *PlanetSide* world, as there are long distances to cover. Players can also elect to be dropped off anywhere on the islands by passing dropships





The current beta stages of testing have involved a vast amount of tweaking and there'll be loads left to go as the game now enters a larger public beta that will involve thousands of players

Supply and demand

What's interesting about *PlanetSide*'s combat dynamic is its vast scope. As with real-world conflict, the armies require not simply cannon fodder, but drivers, medics, pilots and even computer hackers to break into enemy bases. Players will always have a large number of options open to them, but these skills will be improved and specialised over time, leading to hybrid character classes, the sniper-pilot, or the hacker-assault trooper.

Onimusha Buraiden

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November**

When Capcom enjoys massive success with a franchise, it milks it for all its worth. And now it's Onimusha's turn…





Set for western release as *Onimusha: Blade Warriors*, this side-story looks like being a lighthearted romp for the easily pleased

Forget art, Capcom has developed a very modern, corporate approach to development recently. Every major game – sorry, product – is a brand open to wider merchandising and franchise exploitation. Hence the 'Resident Evil' film, and a forthcoming US film adaptation of *Onimusha*. Apparently there's even going to be a Las Vegas show based on *Onimusha* (with Siegfried and Roy taking on the lead roles, **Edge** hopes). It's all about brand awareness, you see.

So with two years until the *Onimusha* flick, and a year before a proper sequel, Capcom has lined up this lightweight fourplayer fighter for November, featuring characters from the first two titles as well as a few special guests. Immediately, the four-way aspect brings *Smash Bros.* to mind, and the fact that players can destroy parts of the environment (and collect power-ups) reeks of *Power Stone*.

Akechi Samanosuke and Yagyu Jubei will of course be among the selectable fighters, and you should even be able to take control of a few boss characters. **Edge** sees glimmers of *Samurai Spirits* at work in the background (expect plenty of swordsmen among the selectable protagonists), but the simple button-bashing interface seems to betray this as a brand-splattered quickie for obsessed fanboys.



Twoplayer bouts offer majestic-looking action (left), but the game may fall down on its apparent simplicity. A selection of magical effects (above) will no doubt spice up the oriental proceedings

Smash Cars

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Metro3D**
Developer: **Creat Studio**
Origin: **Russia**
Release: **May**

Previously in **E**112, **E**113

This Russian-developed R/C racer puts a smile on Edge's face, but it could do with a little bit of spit and polish

It's never really possible to predict how much polish a game will receive between early previews and eventual release. In the case of *Smash Cars*, **Edge** would, perhaps unfairly, hazard the guess that it's not going to be a lot, simply because Metro3D lacks any real track record by which to judge. The game certainly needs a little bit between now and release; the preview version clearly lacks sheen, featuring just a couple of the play modes that will appear in the finished game, and it's in obvious need of a bit of balancing. What it absolutely doesn't lack is fun. Even at this rudimentary stage, it's impossible not to be swayed by the superb recreation of the manic handling that characterises radio-controlled cars.

The game's long-term appeal will, however, rely on a compelling structure appearing between now and launch, but even if the finished title only contains the germ of an idea that the preview version does, it will undoubtedly put smiles on gaming faces. Even given the initial difficulty of navigating round courses without the aid of a map, it's a tonic for the jaded generation, and avoiding Brobdingnagian dogs and crocodiles, or deliberately ramming colossal cows, is really entertaining (it's not worth deliberately ramming karting humans). And that's just the singleplayer game.



With such accurately modelled handling, it's a shame Creat didn't manage to secure the Tamiya licence; the prospect of pitting the likes of the Blazing Star against the Hornet or Grasshopper on authentic tracks would have been an enticing one





Edge has so far only toyed with the singleplayer game, but there's enough there to suggest that the multiplayer mode can only be more fun

Freedom: The Battle for Liberty Island

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **IO Interactive**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

Videogames go back to the '80s once again. This time in a war-torn Big Apple overrun by Russkis



Directing allies in combat is *Freedom*'s main selling point and though there's evidence of cliché – Russian soldiers like nothing better than standing next to barrels of explosives – the fact you can heal your recruits suggests that this is no throwaway gimmick. The turn-based sections first mooted at E3 have now been dropped

Not since the days of 'Red Dawn' and 'Rambo: First Blood Part II' has America felt so threatened. Angst and paranoia can manifest itself in a number of ways: hysterical news bulletins, increased domestic security, invasion of other countries. It can also communicate itself through cultural artifacts. *Freedom: The Battle for Liberty Island* is set in a New York overrun by the USSR (they're our friends now, so that's okay). Your task is to liberate the city from the communist ilk and restore the American way of life. Hmmm.

Political overtones aside, *Freedom* has one interesting feature that makes it worth following. Predominantely a thirdperson action game, the title also lets you recruit a number of freedom fighters to help you fight the cause. Your charisma increases as tasks are completed and enemies neutralised, and once you've achieved a certain level of notoriety you can direct up to 12 other men. Simple commands can be issued to recruits and, though battles are very localised, the AI already appears solid. It's possible, for instance, to direct ground battles from high ledges or window vantage points.

Current code suggests that *Freedom* could well turn out to be an enjoyable thirdperson action game. It's just a shame about that subtitle.





Visually the game is nothing to get excited about but the recruit commands are implemented well, ensuring that *Freedom* has some novelty

Empires: Dawn of the Modern World

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Stainless Steel Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

One thousand years of conflict is the promise. Which means you'll face all manner of aggressive options...





Empires is an exuberant take on the RTS – something like realtime chess crossed with 'Top Trumps', but with special moves



The universe is bright and colourful, eschewing traditional battle camouflage for distinctive friend/enemy colour coding

"Have you ever wanted to hurl disease-infested livestock into your enemy's town?" asks **Rick Goodman**, Empires' lead designer. It is quite obvious what is coming next, and it's not a written measure of disgust at your cattle-chucking desires. "Now you can," reveals the press release, thus revealing *Empires*' central theme: it allows those who love both real-world history and PC wargaming to indulge in both at the same time, and with a little more variety than your average single-era RTS.

That's because *Empires* spans 1,000 years, from the beginning of the middle ages right up to WWII and beyond, and as such is comprised of fighting units from Korean Koryo spearmen to German Bismarck-class battleships. Combat isn't as simple as linear improvements in strength and range, though: each unit and civilisation has its own abilities, and learning how to use them properly will prove as vital to long-term victory as worming your way up the *Civilization*-style tech-tree.

Those wishing to discard all the long-term development in favour of quick multiplayer thrills should find something to enjoy here, too, since Stainless Steel plans on including a set of rules specifically targeted at gamers with attention spans significantly shorter than a millennium.

Prescreen Alphas

This month's announcements and updates...

Amped 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft Games Studio





Better visuals, more mountains, Xbox Live stats support, and play areas designed by world-renowned snow park architect Chris Gunnarson. Expect more details after E3 in May

Jak II: Renegade

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Naughty Dog





A darker tone, larger environments and more polygons are promised for the sequel to Sony's flagship platformer. For more info read the Jason Rubin interview in 'Edge presents: Equip'

Rise Of Nations

Format: PC
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Big Huge Games





At the risk of oversimplification, Microsoft's latest RTS seems to straddle ground previously trodden by *Age of Empires* and *Civilization*, probably with the company's customary polish

Transformers

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Takara
Developer: In-house





These shots are suggestive of FMV rather than ingame footage, but they're enough to get **Edge** arguing about which Transformer is the best. The answer is, obviously, Brawn. He's the strongest

Wallace and Gromit

Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Bam! Entertainment
Developer: Frontier Software





Not the most obvious game for **Edge**'s pages, but as it does come from the brain behind *Elite* we thought it worth checking out. Novel gadgets and great animation should ensure its success

Batman

Format: GC, Xbox
Publisher: Kemco
Developer: In-house





There's no faulting Kemco's evocation of the comic book version of Batman; it's just a shame that the gameplay sections are riddled with problems – most notably a horrible input system

Burnout 2

Format: GC, Xbox
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Criterion Games





On GC (top): as on PS2 but with extra crash junctions. On Xbox (above): increased polygon count, cubic environment mapping, extra decal skins, 5.1 surround, and stats-only Live support

Hidden & Dangerous 2

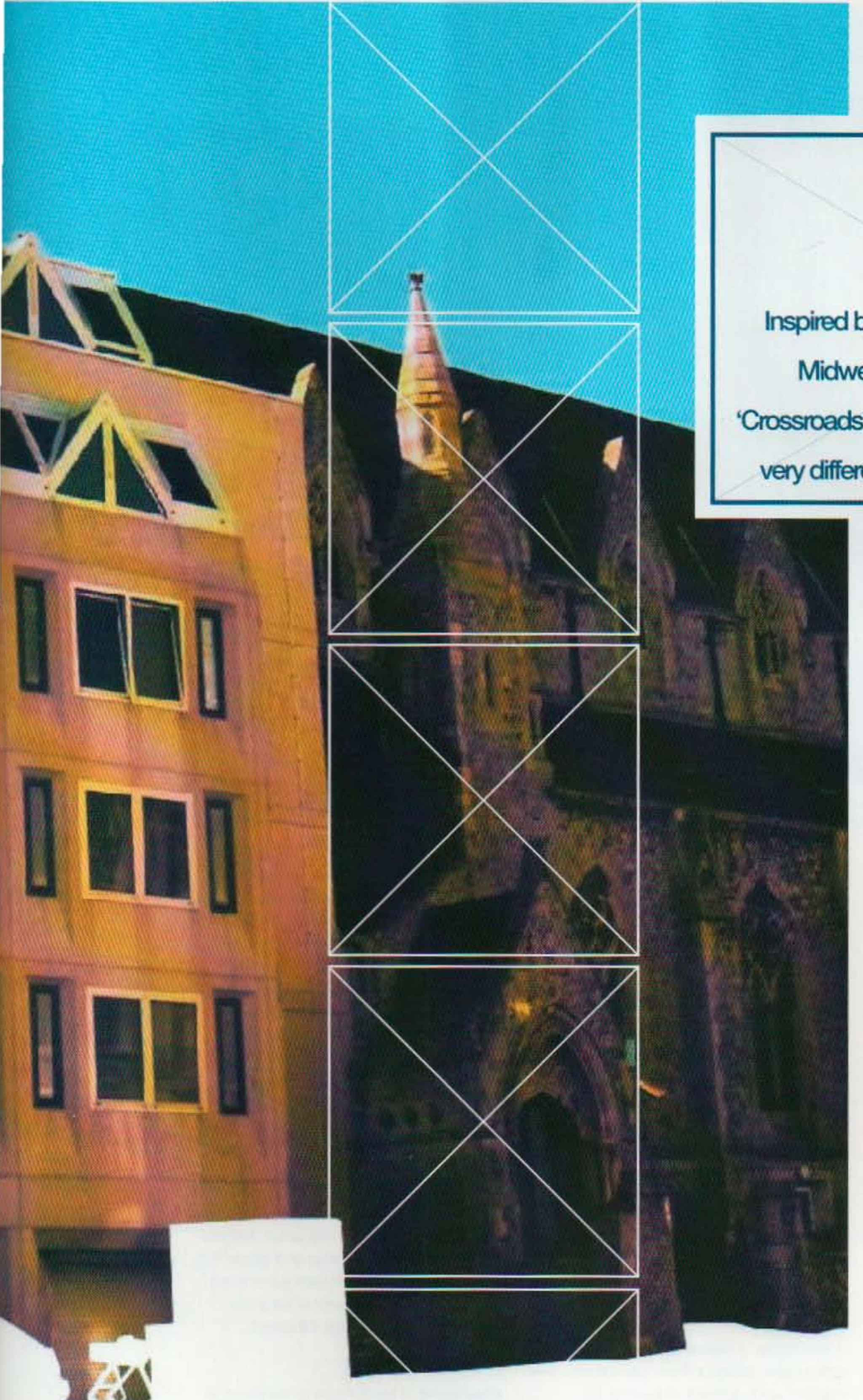
Format: PC
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: IO Interactive





Shots arrived just as **Edge** went to press, so details are still thin on the ground. And while the same cannot be said of military-themed FPSs these days, pedigree still counts for much


HILL



Inside...

Climax

Inspired by Kerouac's travels across the American Midwest, and Britney Spears' adventures in 'Crossroads', Edge journeys across the UK to see three very different Climax studios. Summary? Road trip!

This is a story about Technology, Rivalry and, ultimately, Loss. It begins in Nottingham, where **Edge** pulls its hat tight over its head to keep out the cold and backtracks past a funfair, lost in a strange city, trying to find Climax's Nottingham studio. It turns out the codeshop's hidden round a corner off a main shopping street in the city centre, above and behind a bridal boutique, inside a discreet office block which is slowly being consumed by Men Who Love Orcs. The lift has flock wallpaper, and shakes as **Edge** makes its way up to the fourth floor. The walls feature beautifully depicted paintings of terribly vile demons. This is where Climax is developing *Warhammer Online*, and it's the first leg of a three-day, three-studio tour which takes **Edge** around the country in search of Climax's soul.

Enthusiastic as ever **Edge** has arrived early. Trains go faster than cars, it turns out; that's why Climax's PR, Dawn Beasley, is stuck in a jam somewhere between here and the Solent, and that's why **Edge** is sipping water in a reception room, chatting to **Matt Sansam**, producer of *Warhammer Online*.

Now, Sansam's a hardcore MMRPG player, and talks about his relationship with *Everquest* in the same way that Zammo talked about heroin. He's doing two accounts now, but he can handle it – not so some of the company's ex-employees, who've been sacked because their habit got in the way of their work. As he loses **Edge** in acronyms and MM terms, it becomes apparent that there is a hierarchical order of nerdiosity in the game dev world, and right now we are at the pyramid's cap. There are game developers, and then there are game developers who work on MMRPGs, and then there are game developers who are working on the MMRPG licence for the world's most important geek franchise: *Warhammer*.

This is not a bad thing. Beasley arrives, and the tour of the studio begins, and if there needed to be an illustration then it's there as soon as **Edge** arrives on the shop floor.

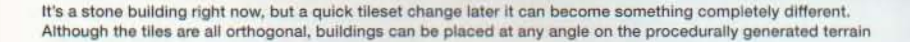











It's a stone building right now, but a quick tileset change later it can become something completely different. Although the tiles are all orthogonal, buildings can be placed at any angle on the procedurally generated terrain



This Lego-style approach to building might seem prone to architectural homogeneity, but actually it's the opposite. Using tiles means that building designers can produce different structures much quicker than their polygon-model counterparts, meaning that *Warhammer*'s towns are rich and varied

There are paper world maps spread out in the corner, lovingly prepared like centre-page pullouts from decades-old computer mags. Another is pinned on the wall, and two of the design team stand by it, discussing… well, **Edge** doesn't know what they're discussing, but their hands sweep across the peaks and valleys of *Warhammer*'s alternative Earth like this is the ultimate wargame. In a way it is; the team is creating 900 square kilometres of a universe that 300,000 Warhammer fans dream about living in, depicting it in the kind of detail previously confined to teenage midnight fantasy. Quite an undertaking.

A brief demo of the tech – more of that later – and Sansam leads **Edge** next door to the art and animation studio. You know the sort of thing; lots of desks, lots of computers, lots of orcs, lots of citadel miniatures, a few actual swords, and some massive sketchbooks full of concept art for the game drawn by one of Games Workshop's chief artists, Dave Gallagher. This room is more spacious, and apparently the artists take advantage of that – the best way of working out the correct way that someone falls to the floor is, well, by making them fall to the floor. "Actually, you're lucky they weren't trying out the sword animation routines," chuckles Sansam, and leads **Edge** into the conference room. The party sit down, and there's a click as the dictaphone is switched on…

So, ponders **Edge**. The team here is clearly dedicated, but presumably that's only symptomatic of the pressure it's under to get it right, pressure that comes straight from the anxious stares of an unfeasibly dedicated fanbase. Is that pressure a blessing or a curse? Technical director **Rocko Loscalzo**, who speaks throughout the interview with an unnerving anxiety that makes **Edge** want to give him a cuddle and tell him everything's going to be okay, confirms:

"There's a hell of a lot of expectation, not only among the fanbase but also among GW itself. I'm sure you've had it explained to you, but there are weekly art reviews, where not-quite-every single piece of artwork, every single texture gets reviewed and signed off. And you can take it as read that before stuff gets to that review it's gone through at least two or three passes internally, where people watch the style, the attention to detail, the period…"

Creative control

Edge makes to say something, but the issue of creative control has got Loscalzo riled.

"There was a time with the Bloodletters. The concept sketch was wrong; they were pictured with axes, and they'd always had Hellblades, swords, and that set alarm bells ringing. So someone looks at that and goes, 'No, that's just wrong. They *obviously* should have swords…'"



And then there are the places the company's had to start from scratch.

"Oh yeah, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers. I mean, there are loads of people impaling children on the ends of spikes, but not an awful lot of the stuff in between. It's all extremes."

Which is an interesting point. While Games Workshop has provided Climax with a glorious setting and a rich amount of material, and that trust has been repayed with a fleshed-out definitive version of its universe, some things just won't transfer to the game without some world-quaking creativity on the Nottingham studio's part. You see, **Edge** can't see the hardcore fans objecting to Climax introducing a butcher, but redressing the parallel universe's inherent sexism by bringing in – gasp – female wizards seems like it could cause a little consternation among the fans.

"Well, indeed," says Loscalzo, memories of feverish fancons writ large in his furrowed brow. "Suffice to say that anything that comes through will be under the approval of GW. We haven't got total free reign. Realistically, having a well-established IP can help and hinder the art side. You either find you're in a nice-sized box, or something that's very restricted. I think *Warhammer* has been both of those. You need to follow the path, but that path can get wider and narrower, because at some points it's much more clearly defined than others. I mentioned the animation side of things, but there's just no precedent for that in the *Warhammer* universe. It's never been done."

Another thing that's never been done, and here comes the Technology bit, *Warhammer*'s landscape is so big that the landscape has to be procedurally generated. The hills and valleys are carved with a set of proprietary tools produced by the company, and can be reduced to complex formulae, rather than polygonal coordinates. Buildings can be placed anywhere upon them, but again, they're not rigid models but built from flexible sequences of tiles, Climax Nottingham's Lego-style way of producing lots of complex, disparate architecture, quickly. And each tile comes in myriad flavours, so a church can be changed to a ruined church or a church in the forest just by switching the set. It's a beautiful, simple system, and part of planning for the future.

Core technology

"Part of our aim, as part of Climax the company, was to produce core technology. What we have now is the core tech applied to *Warhammer*. If we wanted to, we could take all that tech and apply it to something else. You've seen that example with it applied to a cityscape, skyscrapers, that sort of thing. If I was to tell you that our entire animation system, our entire model system, really wouldn't care whether it was a *Warhammer* mode, a 40k model, a Scooby Doo... whatever, it doesn't matter. You could have Spider-Man popping up in the middle of a Skaven-infested tunnel system..."

And what would the hardcore think of that?

"They'd probably be confused..."

Angry?

"Indeed."

Upset?

"Exactly."

Still, just think how many levels you'd go up for killing Spidey. **Edge** is joking, of course, just going for extra geek credit, but Sansam interjects.

"We're not a level-based game. We're a skills and career-based game."

Do explain.

"Well, when you first create a character you'll have these basic skills. You'll be able to

Climax Brighton
Home to *MotoGP* and other (undisclosed) vehicle projects

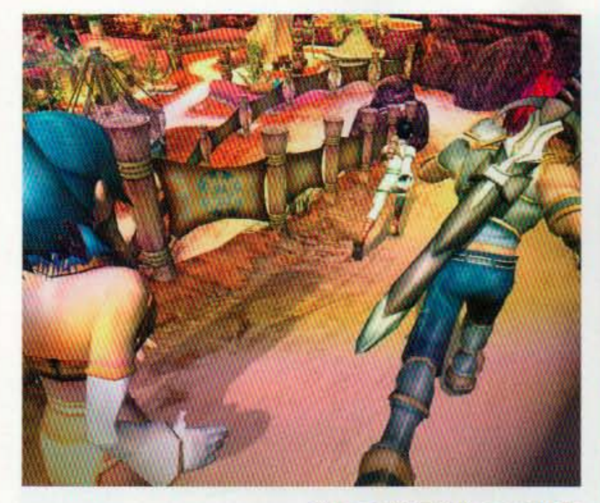


Climax Solent
Home to *Sudeki* and other (undisclosed) projects



Climax Nottingham
Home to *Warhammer Online*

Bright and beautiful and bullet-time; when players move to their inventory to change tactics or pause for thought, *Sudeki*'s time slows down to a fraction of what it was. It's enough to give the player impetus to make a quick decision, but allows tactical play too







run, hit things with sticks, swim – basically, that's all you know. What you need to do then is join a career. By doing that you unlock skills, so if you go and join the ratcatchers guild they'll teach you how to move quietly in an urban environment, the locksmiths will teach you how to pick locks… and as you progress through those career systems you'll get various quests, various things to do. Then there's an 'exit career', so if I've been a ratcatcher I can take the assassin route, go more down the animal handling route. Think tech trees in *C&C* with a roleplaying overlay. High-level careers will require a certain number of prerequisite careers."

And…

"The way we do player-versus-player combat is also tied into that career system. So if, for example, you're a witchhunter, and I'm a witch, we're flagged as PvP. So that means all the witchhunters will be after the witches, and so on. There are some careers that aren't flagged as PvP, so if you join the Amethyst College of Magic, you can learn the lore of death within the college – it's a little bit dodgy, but generally it's okay. If you decide it's too slow, and go and become an out-and-out sorcerer, or necromancer, the road to power is a lot faster, but you get flagged as PvP and hunted down by the witchhunters, the paladins and so on. And that's where the career chat channels come into their own, because if you tell everyone, 'Oh, there's a whole bunch of witches outside Mordor,' then a whole bunch of your witchhunter colleagues are going to turn up, and a bit of PvP team action…"

Sansam's eyes glaze over. **Edge** takes it as a cue to leave and head back to the hotel. In the evening, **Edge** argues with him about the 20 most significant titles in videogaming, and he speaks with quiet, understated passion, like how **Edge** imagines you might speak if you weren't just reading quietly. Some food, some alcohol, some late-night bitching; **Edge** returns to its hotel room, and, somewhere along the route loses its hat. But **Edge** won't notice this for a while, and so it's happy. To tomorrow.

Feeling for snow

The road trip bit part one: **Edge** is in the car. The hat is lost, every lorry driver from here to there seems to slow up just in front, and every time we brake the pen slips and the questions **Edge** is scribbling on the pad just become illegible ink spiders. A couple of hours later…

"See, in Finland, we have [some number] types of snow," says the Finnish lead designer pointing out one of *Sudeki*'s superficial strong points – the way the cold white stuff catches the light on the floor – "so you know I really care about this." **Edge** can tell **Tuomas Pirinen** really does care about it. Hell, he cares about a lot of things. Just look at the conifers; when the wind blows, their branches bounce gently up and down, not left and right which is "completely and utterly wrong." Apparently.

And then he shows **Edge** the core of the game, the party-based realtime fighting aspect which might be *Final Fantasy* designed by Eugene Jarvis. **Edge** won't take that any further though, since the build today is the same build **Edge** wrote about last time, and it's still as colourful and dramatic, and there's nothing new to say. Still, a second visit provides a chance to ask Climax Solent MD **Joseph Cavalla** a few of those questions that





Sudeki's aesthetic has come under fire from rabid otaku, but it's only when you see it moving you really understand what Climax is trying to achieve. Doubters would do well to wait for an opportunity to visit the curiously-hued landscape in person





mouthy readers have fed back into **Edge**'s Internet forum: namely, "why the hell r u making a lame rpg when zleda alredy exists???! and all that lame boob shiznit and aren't u ashamed?"

"I don't think we're ashamed of what it is," says Cavalla, with the patience of a man who's already told his team that the haters just aren't worth the effort. "It's a very important game for us, and it's a very important game for Microsoft. You can see who and what we're competing against. I don't think I have to spell that out. It's fundamentally important for Microsoft that it has a market-leading RPG exclusive to Xbox."

Like *Azurik* and *Nightcaster*?

"'Launch titles', I think would be the polite way of describing them."

Still, there's always *Fable*...

"Yeah."

So it's important for Microsoft to have *two* market-leading RPGs exclusive to Xbox?

"We've spoken to the Carters – particularly at X02 in Seville, where we launched – we've got a lot of respect for what they're doing, but the two games are completely different. What *Fable*'s trying to do from a storyline and character development perspective is way beyond what we're doing on *Sudeki*, and I take my hat off to that ambition. But *Sudeki*'s key focus is on realtime combat with multiple characters in the party. That's the battle we've chosen to fight, that's where we're trying to push the genre."

Climax Solent is based in a huge open-plan office which overlooks the sea, ferries chugging to and from the Isle of Wight every half hour. It is the most beautiful office **Edge** has ever seen, although the blinds – like in every game dev studio – are tightly drawn right the way across the length of the building. Gorgeous views are nothing compared to the pain of terrible sunshine reflections on beta builds of your pride and joy. Still, **Edge** wishes that it'd mislaid its hat here instead, so there'd be an excuse to return; it's not a bad location for a company that used to work predominantly in stealth mode on conversions and ports for publishers.

"Yeah, it didn't necessarily bode well for our clients to be overly vocal about what we were doing. Karl [Jeffries, Climax CEO] made a decision to undertake a certain amount of expansion, because what we needed to do was make sure the company grew to a point where we had effective economies of scale. *Sudeki*'s a big project, it has a large team, but it's not the only thing we're doing, and there are four development studios at the moment, with another opening very soon. The good thing from our point of view is that it's all overseen by a group parenting company with centralised human resources, accounting, the usual stuff that studio managing directors are having to worry about is taken care of by the company. And that means I can focus on making games, be they conversions or complex IP generation like *Sudeki*. And tools and tech are vital to that, too."

So there's no negatives to being fractured across the country?

"All of the other MDs and myself talk every week on a conference call, have face to faces once every quarter where we discuss company strategy, and obviously there's the ad hoc level where we just talk when things come up – publisher relations, for instance. Within the group there's a wealth of experience and contacts, and that helps everyone out. There's no kind of competition within studios. It's a case of everybody being there to back each other up and help each other out."

On the other hand, **Edge** has heard that competition can help a company, internally. Just look at *BC* and *Fable*. Let's talk about Rivalry.

"I think it's a little bit different for us, because the nature of the studios is so different. Brighton is very focused on racing games, we're focused on character games, *Warhammer Online* is being developed to make sure Climax creates a MMOG, and that's a huge undertaking in its own right. Builds get shared out, but to be honest with you, competition isn't the same because they're different genres. And *Warhammer Online* looks completely different to *Sudeki*. They're different games."

So share and share alike then?

"Oh, very much so. I think it's a fairly unique company, in that the successful reuse and sharing of tech is fundamentally an ethos that's crucial to the success of the company and the ongoing development of the company. We have some very talented individuals who work on key technology, and try and make it as modular as possible – we're great believers in not reinventing the wheel."



***Sudeki*'s emphasis is on party-based combat, so players may want to keep their magic users near the back providing covering fire. The light-based spot effects are spectacular**

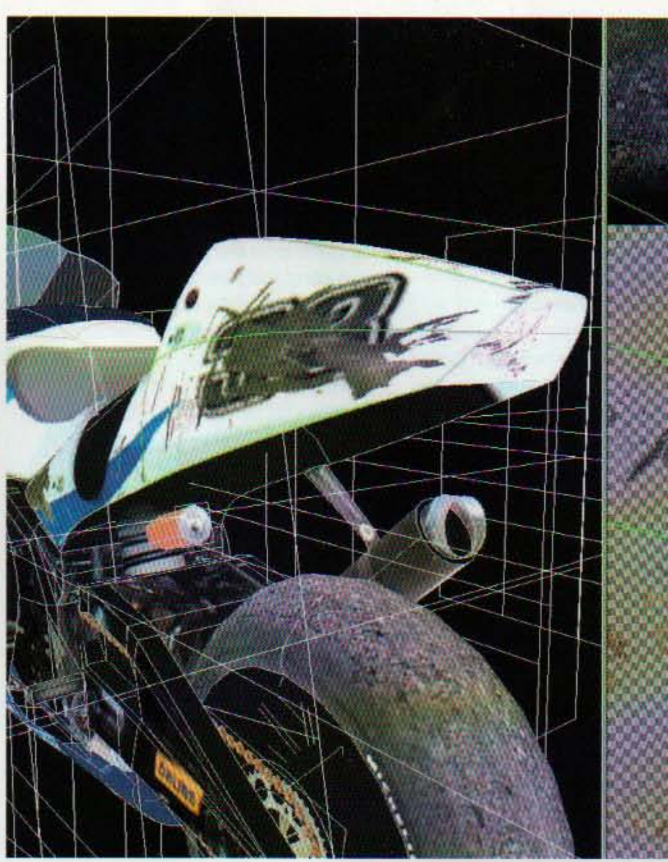
Brighton rocks

Which leads **Edge** along the south coast to Climax Brighton, which is a great believer in

The bike models have been recreated for the sequel, and feature all-new photos of engine internals. Well, **Edge** is sure gearheads will appreciate it









"We knew there wouldn't be a problem relocating people down here. It's an easy sell – come and live by the sea"

reinventing the wheel, because it's a studio that focuses entirely on vehicle games. Badoom tsh; **Edge** congratulates itself heartily on the quip, and takes a brief tour around the three-floor studio. Top floor is *MotoGP2*, where one designer has just been told off for leaving a 50-foot model of a lead artist straddling a track in a build that's just been demoed to a **Edge**. The game's just about to go to submission. This is probably not the time for jokes. Except for the one at the start of this paragraph.

The specialists

But anyway, below that are numerous other projects that **Edge** can't quite talk about yet, but are all being put together in phenomenally short periods of time thanks to Climax's racing game toolset, Blimey. That's its name for a suite of programs that allows the company to reduce development times… "Massively," says **Tony Beckwith**, MD of Climax Brighton. "It's kind of like a proprietary Renderware. It gives us certain advantages over using Renderware, because if everyone uses Renderware, everyone's games are going to end up looking the same."

That reduced dev time must make you popular people with publishers.

"Oh, totally. Totally, totally, totally," affirms Beckwith. And then pauses, because he's not convinced **Edge** yet, and adds, "Totally. Because publishers like to work with specialists, and I think we were the first to say we're a driving games specialist. As a sales thing it's totally worked, so much so that we've got more racing games on the table than the studio can do."

So sure, it's a good thing, but why racing games? And why here, in Brighton?

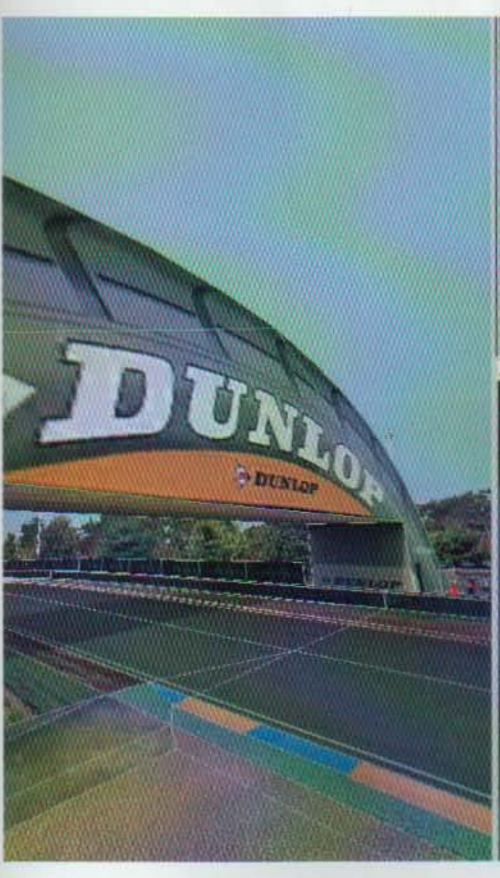
"Well, when we started here, racing games were like 25 per cent of the videogame market. So it was an obvious thing to do. And a lot of the guys here used to work at Probe. The *MotoGP* guys did *Extreme G*, the guys downstairs did *Revolt*, so it seemed like a good angle to go for. I wanted to set up down here because there were no other developers down here. Beautiful location, by the sea. I was getting a bit fed up of London myself, and we knew there wouldn't be a problem relocating people down here, and that's absolutely been the case. It's an easy sell – come and live by the sea."

But doesn't working on so many similar games within the same studio drive – another pun, thanks – people crazy with competition? Joseph Cavalla has already told us it's not





Skins for players and bikes don't include cigarette logos, much to the chagrin of the developer. But if users want to add them in the skinner, there's nothing Climax can do to prevent that; expect to see a mixture of the ultra-realistic and the ultra-obscene on a server near you










It's the obscenely anal level of detail that makes *MotoGP*'s graphics so special. The team went out to each track, took thousands of photographs and made piles of measurements – even the height of tyre walls was recorded to the centimetre

competitive across the studios; how about *inside* the studio?

"I'd say it was competitive within the studio. You find that teams compete naturally to be the best. I think it's human nature. You get a group of guys who end up gelling together, and they're, 'Right, we're going to be the number one squad, we're going to be better than anyone else.' So yeah, it's competitive between the studios, but also between the teams."

Simply the best

The road trip bit part two: on the short drive from Climax's glam Solent HQ to the Brighton satellite, Beasley tells **Edge** – still unaware that its hat is missing, hundreds of miles away – that it's in for a treat with Tony Beckwith. Because he's got a mouth on him, and he's likely to disagree with everything the other guys have said. Now, **Edge** has been dozing for much of the journey, but this wakes it up. A disagreeable interviewee is a good interviewee, and so it's with some disappointment that **Edge** finds Beckwith affable and polite and most uncontroversial.

Have you been surprised at *MotoGP*'s success on Xbox Live?

"No, not at all."

Not even a tiny bit? After all, racing games are rubbish, aren't they? But even that fails to rouse the demons.

"A lot of people passed it up initially – motorbike games aren't for me – but when they got a communicator and a free version, they were like 'Oh, this is quite good isn't it?' And so when *MotoGP2* comes out we're expecting a lot more interest."

Because the online implementation was easily the best of the first generation of Live stuff, wasn't it?

"We get on really well with the advanced technology group at Microsoft, who are the drivers of Xbox Live. And they've been asking us for Xbox Live 2, what sort of features we think should go in, things like that. We're really on the A-list. Microsoft was so impressed with the stuff that we wrote that it actually licensed some of the code back to fold into the SDK. So there's a bit of Climax code in every game that gets released for Xbox Live."

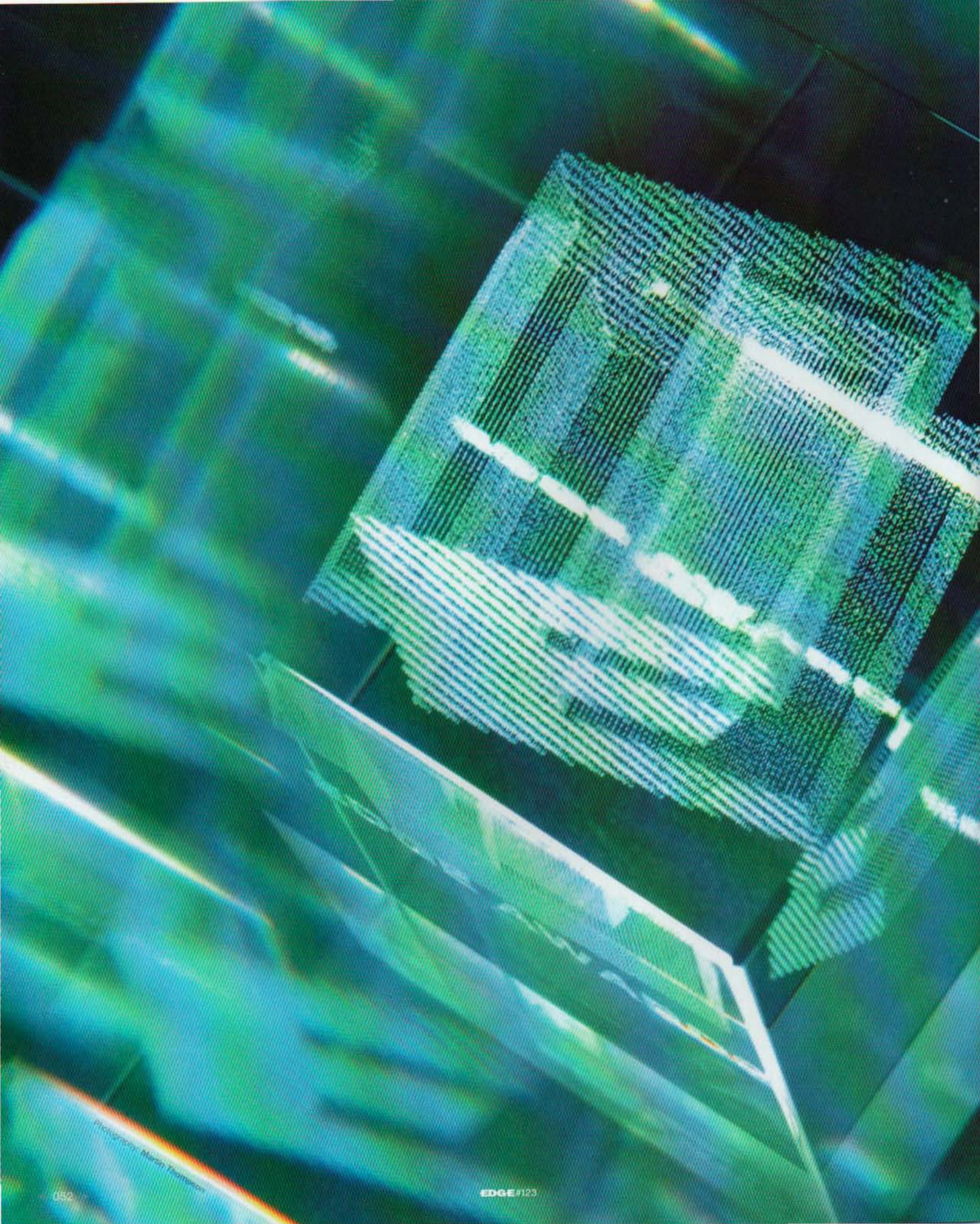
Beckwith finishes this sentence with an 'I'm-the-best!' grin, and it's not overly immodest. See, it's just another demonstration that Climax has the Technology. Its base-level tech means it's thinking long-term, building for the future. And part of that tech comes from Rivalry; not the internal playfighting and playful bitching, but a wider sense that this industry is setting developer against developer, and they need to find themselves in the best position – which means creating tech, and sharing it. It is a smart way of working; the way forward.

That's **Edge**'s closing thought, as the road trip draws to a close with a quiet, sleepy train ride home. Oh, but **Edge** almost forgot: what about Loss? Halfway back, **Edge** wakes up, startled: it realises it can't find its hat, and no amount of phone calls to Dawn Beasley can bring it back.









Edge Awards

Since last year's **Edge** awards the videogame industry has gone from boom to gloom. Six nines and 29 eights hide an increasingly desperate number of licence-reliant software. Still, the winners are…

One large meeting room, a few copies of **Edge**, printouts of all the games and their respective scores, and four members of the editorial team. The task should have been an easy one, but the fact that this year's awards took a whole afternoon (and a portion of the next day) to decide upon reflects how uneven a year it's been for the videogame industry. There have been some magnificent highs – *Metroid Prime* was surprisingly impressive and came about as close to an **Edge** ten as is possible – but in general the breadth and depth of quality has not been as strong as in previous years.

No tens and only six nines is unprecedentedly low, even for **Edge**. But statistics don't say it all – we're all aware that 2002 was a tough year for a number of developers. Rage, Crawfish, Curly Monsters, Red Lemon, Hot Gen Studios all closed, while a number of publishers, such as Bam! Entertainment, Interplay and Virgin Interactive have had to scale down operations considerably to meet the challenges ahead. Innovation in gameplay has hardly been a top priority. Need we forget, this was the year that saw the release of *BMX XXX* and *Britney's Dance Beat*.

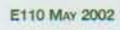
But enough of the gloom: the winners were also difficult to choose because there have been some genuine surprises too. Companies such as Nintendo, Capcom, Treasure and Tecmo have continued to generate new IP despite the industry's general movement towards conservatism. After a slow start the Xbox is now proving itself as the hardcore gamer's platform of choice and the PS2 has reached maturity hosting technically impressive titles such as *TimeSplitters2*, *Burnout 2* and *GTA: Vice City*. While the fate of the GameCube seems less assured (see p10) *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Animal Crossing*, *Metroid Prime* and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (sadly appearing too late for these awards) shows that it's still the home for inventiveness and ingenuity.

And finally, **Edge** had hoped that all the big talk about broadband console gaming would have resulted in some groundbreaking online games, but there's been nothing exceptional. Hopefully the next 12 months will change all that. But, then, that is what we said last year…

Twelve months in screenshots

Not an exhaustive selection, clearly, but something to refresh the memory



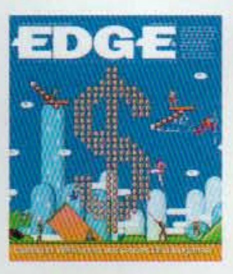

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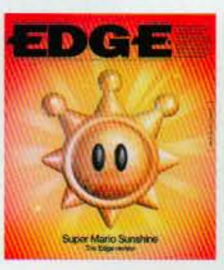
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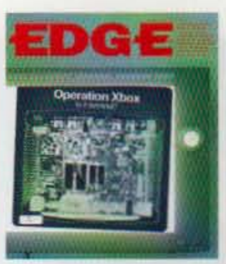


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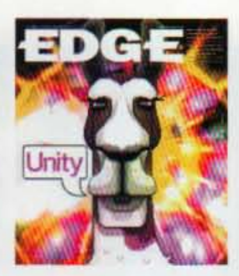
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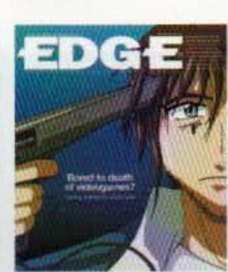
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Game of the Year

For providing the most consistent gamespace, for the most effective integration of graphics, sound and game mechanics, but above all, for delivering the most enjoyable gaming experience of the year

Metroid Prime



Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios

Yes, it has its faults. For example, there's an extremely rare occurence of play mechanic imbalance in the way one of the upgrades, the grapple hook, arrives on the scene too late into the adventure. There are the crash bugs which have, since the GameCube's arrival, so worryingly infected Nintendo's hitherto bulletproof software. Then there's the scanner: encouraging players to scan enemies and items is an elegant way of ensuring they explore their environment to the fullest but by making it a requirement in order to complete the game, a significant weakness is exposed. For instance, fail to scan one of the bosses (easily done in the heat of battle, we assure you, and bound to happen early on while the whole scanning process isn't second nature), and because you won't meet again, you'd better ignore your completist tendencies. It's an unnecessarily punitive element, but one that obviously encourages replaying through the game.

And there can be few who won't relish such an opportunity. For despite the (ultimately forgiveable) faults listed above, *Metroid Prime* offers an astonishing gaming experience. Indeed, the finest **Edge** has encountered this year. It's the fittest update for Nintendo's much-cherished *Metroid* franchise its fans could have hoped for, including every aspect from the prequels while also adding some masterful twists of its own. And although it's been said before, it's worth pointing out again: this is one of the finest 2D-to-3D transitions yet seen. A simply staggering display of design and coding savoir faire. And a title that no gamer can afford to miss.

Neverwinter Nights

two





It could just be **Edge**'s unhealthy predilection for 'Dungeons & Dragons' and the way in which the 'Third Edition' rules have provided a sound mechanical basis for *Neverwinter Nights*. Or perhaps the epic plot running throughout the game. Maybe it is, in fact, the hub structure that enhances the epic scope of the narrative. Or it could be the way in which BioWare has crafted an interface that allows absolute ease of use in a variety of different ways. Maybe it's the multiplayer implementation of the basic campaign. Indeed it might even be the ability for a group of players to elect a DM who can adapt the multiplayer campaign on the fly. Heck, it could even be the fact that the game provides an inexhaustible amount of adventuring hours thanks to the versatility of the Aurora toolset and the ease with which it can be used.

But perhaps it's simply that it's a fool's errand to attempt to alight upon a single facet of the game that's responsible for the undeniable overall excellence of *Neverwinter Nights*. In any case, whatever the answer, it's the game that, over the past 12 months of reviews, has proved second only to *Metroid Prime* in **Edge**'s estimation. Which is a pretty significant achievement.

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: BioWare

Super Mario Sunshine

three





The long-awaited next-generation instalment of *Super Mario* seems to have divided opinion. On the one hand there are those who appear to have decided that the game's inferiority next to only the best platforming game ever is some sort of criminal act for which there can be no redemption. On the other hand, there are those who would forgive Nintendo anything, even the undeniable presence of a handful of bugs and some exceedingly punishing sections. **Edge** doesn't fall into either camp.

We're certainly not forgiving Nintendo anything by recognising the way in which *Sunshine* eclipses just about every other platform title, by featuring the sort of design detail that escapes seemingly every developer apart from the Kyoto giant. Even the much-maligned camera system allows levels to be designed with dizzying vertical scope, each one offering a multitude of different ways to capture almost every shine, and above all providing an almost unmatched incidence of moments that are genuinely joyful. But we are willing to concede that there are moments that are less than glorious. Nevertheless, while there's the obvious disappointment that *Sunshine* didn't manage to eclipse Mario's original 3D outing, it's still, undeniably, a magnificent videogame.

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Finalists



Animal Crossing (GameCube)
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball (Xbox)
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (PlayStation2)
Medieval Total War (PC)
TimeSplitters2 (PS2, Xbox, GC)

Publisher of the Year

Irrespective of commercial success, or the numerical superiority of its release schedule, **Edge**'s Publisher of the Year has demonstrated an unmatched commitment to providing gamers with the widest catalogue of interesting and enjoyable videogames

one

Nintendo

The raw statistics say it all: in a patchy year for most, Nintendo still managed to produce six games scoring an **Edge** eight out of ten or higher. No other company came close.

After missing out on an award last year it's been a resurgent period for the Kyoto company. *Metroid Prime*, *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Animal Crossing* proved that games can still offer inspirational moments and gameplay to eat away the hours. And while many still bemoan Nintendo's decision to reproduce its magnificent back catalogue on GBA, with titles such as *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and *Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island*, **Edge** welcomes back such fond favourites, especially when they contain various extra features and link-up options.

But it's Nintendo's insistence on innovation over me-too software that constantly impresses. *Animal Crossing*, in particular, displayed an overwhelming level of inguenuity (see Gameplay Innovation) that held NTSC gamers enraptured. The GBA link-up cable has also enabled developers to exploit new gameplay avenues. The company's poor commercial and marketing strategy in Europe still exasperates, but in terms of raw output Nintendo has had no peer over the last 12 months.



two

Electronic Arts

It's all too easy to take pot shots at the company responsible for annual instalments of the likes of *FIFA*, *Madden* and *Harry Potter*. But it's worth remembering that this is also the company that brought the world *The Sims* and *Black & White* – hardly the most generic of games. Indeed the company wouldn't be able to produce its annual updates had it not created the franchises in the first place; that it does so is a testament to the diversity of the company's output, and its canny reinvestment in new properties. Which has continued over the past 12 months: *Medal of Honor Frontline*, *Freekstyle*, *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*, *Dead to Rights*, *SimCity 4* and *Command & Conquer: Generals*. There have even been moments of creative brilliance; how easy it would have been to rely on the 'Lord of the Rings' licence to sell a piece of shovelware.



three

Ubi Soft

Ubi Soft used to be that quaint French developer, you know, the one responsible for *Rayman*. But over the last year it's been doing a lot of growing up. Although some may blanch at its flogging of the Tom Clancy brand, there's no question that the licence has been attached to some sterling efforts. From *Splinter Cell*'s visual excellence and novel gadgetry through to the tense strategical ops of *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*, Ubi Soft has delivered every time. *Ghost Recon* also emerged as the best Xbox Live launch game despite its clumsy frontend. The company's decision to publish Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* on GBA was also welcome and provided gamers with the format's best RPG, pre *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*.



Finalists



Capcom
Konami
Microsoft
Sega

Developer of the Year

With publisher conservatism at an all-time high, the Developer of the Year award is a testament to both technical artistry and wilful creativity, rewarding those responsible for providing the broadest number of videogaming highs

one



Tecmo

Not everybody is going to either 'get' *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* or forgive the game its emphasis on female flesh. But surely the fundamentally interesting design principles that inform it are openly apparent. Eschewing both the goal-oriented and hyperviolent design sensibilities that characterise the broad mass of videogames and the commercial imperatives that drive them, Tecmo's decision to create a game that's all about friendship and relaxation was an admirable one. What's more, it was vindicated by the skill with which the game was executed.

But it's not just *Beach Volleyball* that attests to Tecmo's willingness to disregard design traditions in the interest of constructing new visions of videogaming. *Fatal Frame* is another highly enjoyable title that disregards the violent tone of traditional survival horror, opting instead for panicky chases and a more psychologically chilling sense of unease.

And while this tendency towards (successful) creative experimentation would be commendable enough in its own right, Tecmo also managed to find time to produce the more conventional, though no less enjoyable, *Rygar*. Here's hoping that the company can sustain such an intelligent and entertaining output over the next 12 months. And here's looking forward to *Ninja Gaiden*.



Treasure

two

Even in spite of that review score back in **E**1, **Edge** is constantly accused of displaying a pronounced degree of fanboyism when it comes to Treasure. And rightfully so. After all, though the company's flights of fancy don't always turn into the most enjoyable videogames, the company is almost alone among developers in pursuing intriguing, innovative, and above all, idiosyncratic design notions with such a blatant disregard for commercial logic. This year is no exception with both *Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting* and *Ikaruga* demonstrating the company's hallmark sense of style and play. Which just makes **Edge** treasure Treasure even more.



Retro Studios

three



Regardless of the extent of Nintendo's involvement in *Metroid Prime*'s development, Retro's staff clearly has a comprehensive, fundamental understanding of the *Metroid* series. To be able to update the series in such a masterful manner – essentially delivering one of the most seamless 2D-to-3D transitions in videogaming history – necessitates levels of game design ingenuity the majority of developers can only dream of achieving. Crucially, it requires the kind of coding expertise that cannot be injected into a team that doesn't possess the ability in the first place. Sure, guidance from NCL was taken, but ultimately the majority of the work (and by definition significant development decisions) remained the responsibility of the Austin-based team. And no other output this year is irrelevant. In *Prime*, the team has produced a phenomenal piece of electronic entertainment.

RETRO.STUDIOS

Finalists

BioWare
Climax Motorsports
Koei
Nintendo Corporation Ltd
Rockstar North

Gameplay Innovation of the Year

one



Who said innovation was dead? The past 12 months have seen several developers exploring and contesting the boundaries of existing gameplay structures, through experimentation with interface design and the innovative use of input hardware, and by tinkering with established mechanics

Animal Crossing

It's not really about the way that players can post items to each other with the simple code system, causing the Internet equivalent of multi-coloured swap shops to spring up on forums across the Web. Nor is it entirely to do with the clothing collection, or the way the game lets you design your own outfits in the sewing shop, producing a pixel art show-off competition in Out There. And it has little to do with the integration of the card reader, which brought a physical element of catch-'em-all into an entirely virtual world.

The reason *Animal Crossing* is **Edge**'s Gameplay Innovation of the Year is a combination of all these things – and the smart way it uses the system clock, and the intra-town postal system, and the clever random elements – and the way the game ties them all together with snail-pacing. It is a new, fantastically relaxing way of gaming; there is only so much to do in EdgeTown every day, be it beachcombing, visiting the island, or running petty errands; but you absolutely cannot *wait* for tomorrow. Niche? **Edge** can't think of a more easily accessible game, and that it is yet to appear in Europe is thoroughly disappointing.

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



Neverwinter Nights

two



It's increasingly commonplace for PC developers to throw in their development tools when their latest opus ships to stores, in a bid to stave off commercial mediocrity by courting the mod community. Certainly BioWare's not the first developer to have such an idea, and the Aurora toolset is not the first such world builder. It is, however, unprecedented in its ease of use and in its versatility. BioWare has even gone so far as to create a toolset that even **Edge** can get to grips with; one that's capable of fashioning the most basic (particularly in **Edge**'s case) dungeon crawl or the most multi-faceted persistent world. And by facilitating DM intervention on the fly (to compensate for a lack of programming skills, perhaps), *Neverwinter Nights* really does offer an infinite gaming variety.

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: BioWare



The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

three

Film footage in videogames is no longer a new phenomenon, yet gamers have become accustomed to poorly implemented clips shoe-horned into games as end-of-level intervals. EA's magnificent use of the 'Lord of the Rings' licence changed all that. Using footage from the first two films in the trilogy the title elegantly segues from DVD imagery to in-game scenes with unprecedented artistry. The technique effectively elevates a decent game into something bordering on the spellbinding. From Weathertop to Helm's Deep the game has captured Peter Jackson's re-imagining of Tolkien's Middle-Earth with great expertise. A host of unlockable DVD extras round off a package that comprehensively shows other developers how to get the most out of a film licence.

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: EA
Developer: In-house



Finalists

Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball (Xbox)
Eternal Darkness (GameCube)
The Mark of Kri (PlayStation2)
Zettai Zetsumei Toshi (PlayStation2)

Graphical Achievement of the Year

Graphical Achievement isn't merely about technical expertise; it's about establishing a visual aesthetic that stands on its own merits, regardless of new gaming hardware

one

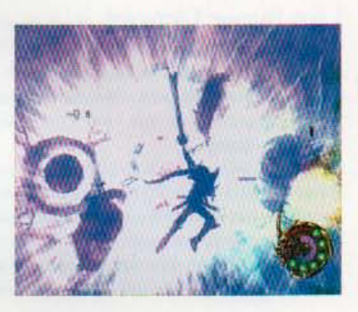


O.TO.GI

It's getting to the stage where videogames are approaching parity when it comes to the technical challenge of pushing polygons onscreen and dressing them up in pretty visual effects. Ironically, though, this makes it even easier for games to stand out from their peers by adopting an interesting or experimental visual aesthetic. Games like *O.TO.GI*, for example. In a year that's seen a lot of developers jumping on the cel-shading bandwagon with varying degrees of success, From Software's distinctive graphical styling may be too subtle for some to appreciate. But instead of choosing the easy option, *O.TO.GI* confidently sets about re-imagining a classic period in Japan's mythical history, and does so beautifully.

It does so by utilising inspiring and original character designs; by featuring a breathtaking variety of environments; by creating idiosyncratic spaces; and by including some pulse-quickening set-pieces. Above all, though, *O.TO.GI*'s singular sense of visual style fits seamlessly with the game's impressive soundtrack and architectural majesty; lightning crackles as monumental sky dragons bristle overhead; cherry blossom petals flutter to the ground with metallic chimes; disembodied voices lead Raiko through the gloom; cliff faces crumble beneath his sword with an earthy boom. Simply put, *O.TO.GI* is a towering graphical achievement.

Format: Xbox
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-house



two

Ikaruga

It's a sad reality that too many players (including those who should really know better) consider 2D gaming to be inferior to the three-dimensional variety. An absurd outlook, certainly, and thankfully softcos such as Treasure are still around to show the world what can be achieved within two axes of movement. Still, gameplay issues aside it's a joy to see *Ikaruga* also shaming far more ambitious projects from far wealthier outfits in the visual stakes, and (again) setting the visual limits of the vertical shoot 'em up.

And how. Each wave of enemies offers a lesson in inventive character and structural design, their splendour only fully appreciated by spectators – players are likely to be far too preoccupied with negotiating their ship through the sublime sea of pyrotechnics and laser fire. "A graphical tour de force," goes the old (and dreadful) videogame reviewer cliché. Yet it's rarely seemed as apt.

Format: Dreamcast, GameCube
Publisher: ESP
Developer: Treasure



three

Panzer Dragoon Orta

Sure, it's probably easier, technically, to produce dizzying depictions of alien worlds if the action is proscribed by keeping the player on rails. But over the past 12 months there are few games that have matched the dazzling imagination that has self-evidently gone into *Panzer Dragoon Orta*. Over the game's short span, Smilebit has managed to include stunning vistas, icy wastes and abstract spaces, each populated by rampaging herds of strange beasts, languidly airborne behemoths, or agitated alien craft. It's almost as if Microsoft had commissioned an advert for the technical capabilities of the Xbox. A particularly effective one at that.

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Smilebit



Finalists

Auto Modellista (PlayStation2)
Gio Gio's Bizarre Adventure (PlayStation2)
Metroid Prime (GameCube)
Super Mario Sunshine (GameCube)

Audio Achievement of the Year

one



The Audio Achievement award is given to the videogame that boasts the highest quality soundtrack and effects, and the most effective integration of these with the core game mechanics

Metroid Prime

Like *Super Metroid* before it, *Prime* reveals its aural credentials even before the game begins. The title-screen sequence, like all of *Prime's* original melodic output, averts videogame music cliché with consummate ease, displaying an uncommonly fresh – and at times genuinely symphonic – quality.

In-game, it's more than the masterful effects placement of the Pro Logic II mix. So much more. The way every sonic element has been created as expertly and with as much care as every other of the game's sublime aspects rarely ceases to delight. From the simplest menu screen sfx to the variety in weapon sound, the richness of ambient noise to the credibility of enemies' vocal exclamations, and equipment upgrade jingles to reworked and updated classic *Metroid* scores, *Prime's* audio component works effortlessly in conjunction with the game's aesthetic merits and superlative play mechanic to envelop the player within the game's alien environment in the most consistent and convincing manner **Edge** has experienced in the past 12 months.

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios



two

O.TO.GI

As with all games that stand out for their aural excellence, it's not just the melodic excellence of the soundtrack or the technical merit with which sound effects and musical audio have been implemented in *O.TO.GI* that impresses – though these are certainly worth mentioning. No, the real achievement of *O.TO.GI* when it comes to sound is the way in which every sonic component melds perfectly with every other aspect of the game, reinforcing a sense of atmosphere, creating a perception of place and lending a dramatic pacing to the action. And above all evoking a uniquely satisfying conception of mythic Japan.

Format: Xbox
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-house



three



GTA: Vice City

Any game capable of resurrecting the CD sales of artists such as Kate Bush, Jan Hammer and Kim Wilde is all right by **Edge**. In truth it's hardly an ingenious trick cramming licensed music on to a CD, but Rockstar should at least be commended for delivering the best videogame soundtrack of all time. From the high energy synth beats of Blondie's 'Atomic' to the languorous melody underpinning Cutting Crew's '(I Just) Died in your Arms Tonight', *GTA: Vice City's* recreation of a working world extends to the brilliant implementation of a number of radio stations. Driving through a darkened, rain-drenched city to 'Crockett's Theme' is as moody a videogame experience as you are likely to get.

Format: PS2
Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar North



Finalists



Burnout 2 (PlayStation2)
Colin McRae Rally 3 (Xbox)
Medal of Honor Frontline (PS2, Xbox)
Eternal Darkness (GameCube)

Technical Achievement of the Year

one



For putting the pedal to the metal and extracting every last ounce of technical capacity out of the current crop of gaming hardware, some developers are capable of delivering the most technically sophisticated instances of the medium

MotoGP

It's a damn good racing game, of course. But a hell of a lot of people have only just found that out, thanks to Microsoft's decision to use a demo of the game as the incentive to buy the Xbox Live starter pack. And what a smart decision that was: the Brighton-based wing of Climax has created a user interface for Xbox Live that makes the broadband experience almost completely painless, allowing users to specify skill settings for random Internet opponents or to set up a closed game with a group of friends with absolute ease. Games such as *Ghost Recon* show how hard it is to get this right, and the importance of the UI in creating a great game should not be underestimated.

Still, all that's nothing next to the stuff that goes on behind the frontend. *MotoGP*'s Net code is hugely impressive for a launch title, allowing up to 16 players to race each other, often absolutely free of lag. That somewhat depends on the server's capability, of course, but if there's a solid indication of just how good the programming really is, it's in Microsoft's own appreciation. It's folded the *MotoGP* Live code back into the SDK, meaning that Climax's efforts will influence all future Xbox Live titles, a fitting tribute to its achievement.

Format: Xbox
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Climax (Brighton)



Street Fighter Alpha 3

two

If the handheld version of *Speedball II* was a good reason not to mourn the death of Crawfish, then its recreation of *Alpha 3* provided more than enough reasons to keep your head bowed and wear black for the rest of 2003. It is beyond what any *Street Fighter* fan could have expected – fast, furious, and full of every element that made the original arcade version such a triumph. In fact, it is as good a representation of the game as you could hope to achieve on any home system, often exceeding the excellent PlayStation version, and only losing marks thanks to the cumbersome nature of the Game Boy Advance's controls.

Format: GBA
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Crawfish



Burnout 2

three

Anyone questioning *Burnout 2*'s inclusion here should perhaps take another look at the game's prequel. Agreed, with its RenderWare background, Criterion is better placed than most when it comes to exploiting the PS2's architecture but that doesn't detract from the remarkable technical advancement evident in this sequel. Take a good look: the finish of the car models, the abundance of vehicles onscreen at once, the exuberance of background detail, the superlative lighting effects, the richness of the textures, the consistency (and high) framerate, even the inclusion of an anamorphic widescreen mode and Pro Logic II support… It's an impressively comprehensive package. Technically, very little else has come close to it on Sony's machine this past year.

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Criterion Games



Finalists

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (PlayStation2)
Super Monkey Ball Jr (Game Boy Advance)
TimeSplitters2 (PlayStation2)

Hardware Innovation of the Year

For providing the most sophisticated or interesting technological platform with which to explore or enhance the possibilities of the videogame medium, competition for this year's Hardware Innovation award has been intense

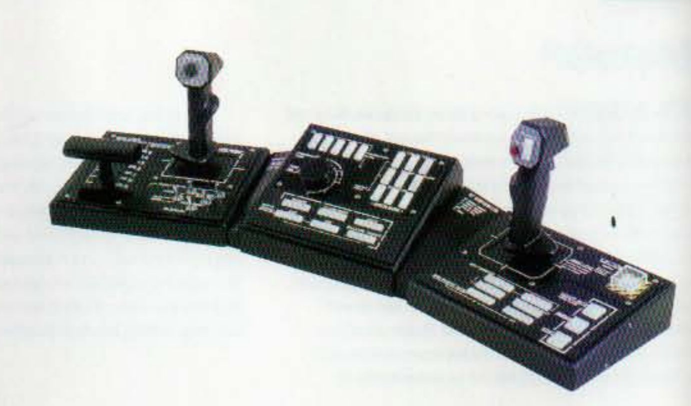
one



Steel Battalion controller

Edge is still a little staggered by the controller that sits in its office, taking up more space than the games PC. Capcom surely never expected to make a profit from the thing? Probably not. But the device wins Capcom much kudos and cements its name as the hardcore gamer's company of choice. At a time when most other publishers were reining in ambitions and producing stultifyingly derivative product, Capcom made *Steel Battalion*. A big robot game that costs £130 and comes bundled with a over 40 button controllers and pedals.

The idea was to recreate the ultimate mech simulator in the home, and Capcom delivered. The build quality is good, with the exception of the gear lever which feels hollow and brittle. The pedals are responsive and the buttons and switches deliver Fisher Price thrills for adults. While it's true that the game itself suffered from some lamentable design problems, namely poor AI and an over-reliance on prescripted events, the controller elevated the experience considerably. The start-up sequence alone, complete with flashing lights and humming noises, is an unmissable videogaming moment. Hopefully Capcom will produce a sequel to take better advantage of the controller this coming year.



two



GP32

An open-source handheld with powerful system specs and a burgeoning, industrious userbase, the GP32 may never be a serious rival to the Game Boy Advance, but it's fast becoming the choice for the pocket hardcore. Commercially developed English-language games are few and far between, but there are plenty of homebrew efforts to download, along with MP3 and movie players. But it's the emulation scene which really impresses, offering support for (among others) PC Engine, Spectrum, C64, NES and Game Boy games. The work-in-progress Super Famicom emulator currently only runs at a handful of frames per second, but if the developer can optimise it to something approaching playable, the system may become absolutely unmissable.



three

GBA SP

You can argue this should have been the original version of the GBA for as long as it takes to complete *Advance Wars*, but it's unlikely to change history. Equally, you can wait for Nintendo to release a scratch-proof metallic version with a headphone jack included. Or you can join the handheld gaming community now: the SP is here and it (mostly) does what it needs to.

Assuming you're not the patient type, what you have here then is a GBA you can play in the dark (if you don't mind the blue tint effect of the front light), that fits comfortably in bigger pockets, doesn't require another pocket for the transportation of spare AA batteries (though, arguably, finding a socket when on the move could prove inconvenient), and whose attractive design will hopefully encourage a new demographic to part with £90. It's not perfect (the verdict is still out on those shoulder buttons) but it is the GBA of choice.

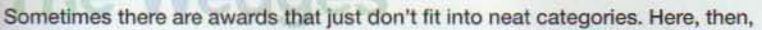


Finalists



Nintendo e-Reader

Game Boy Advance/GameCube link-up cable



The Wedges



Sometimes there are awards that just don't fit into neat categories. Here, then, are some of the other highlights, and lowlights, of an eventful 12 months in videogaming

Best use of a licence

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (PlayStation2, EA)

Two *Lord of the Rings* games were released this year. One was a confusing mess containing risible voice acting and pathetic animation, the other was from EA. The seamless transitions between film footage and game has already been discussed, but the developer also managed to dignify Tolkien's universe by producing a robust hack 'n' slash adventure played against the backdrop of beautifully realised locales. Acclaim goes to the publisher for lavishing so much effort on what could so easily have been a tedious journey down a Bagend.



Posthumous developer

Rage

The signs were ominous when Rage reputedly spent around £1m on putting David Beckham's name to a glut of titles. The games performed poorly. Then in an audacious (some might say wrong-headed) move the company put all its eggs in one recuperative drink with the *Rocky* licence (see below). Again the game faltered in the charts. Rage's demise was a real shame because its output was beginning to shine. The 99 per cent-complete *Lamborghini* was a rousing effort and *Andy McNab: Team SAS* displayed an early exuberance. Hopefully both titles will emerge in some fashion in the near future.



Surprise of the Year

Rocky (Xbox, PS2, GameCube, Rage)

There hasn't been a 3D boxing game this good since... well, there's never been a 3D boxing game this good. As soon as the 'Rocky' theme tune fires up you know you're in for a treat, but what follows is a gripping and brutal adventure through the evocative 'Rocky' world. There are a couple of holes in the singleplayer AI, but that's to forget how intense and competitive the twoplayer mode can be. A crying shame that Rage eventually had to throw the towel in.



Biggest Disappointment of the Year

Blinx: The Time Sweeper (Xbox, Sega)

It was meant to stretch the boundaries of gameplay, bend videogame conventions and warp your sensibilities. Still, the sound effect accompanying the rewind facility was cool. No, hang on, that was annoying too. A demo at E3 2002 promised much but *Blinx* ended up as an irritating mess of a game. There were some novel ideas, but poor execution ultimately undermined this adventure starring Sega's unlikely new mascot.



Gaming Industry Event of the Year

Edge/'Game On' party

Held among the leafy rooftop gardens of the Barbican Centre the **Edge**/'Game On' bash was thrown to celebrate the cultural heritage and diversity of videogames. It was also a fantastic opportunity to get drunk, watch magic tricks, chew the fat with industry bigwigs and play *Tempest* in its original form. There were other good events this year, but they all had too clearly defined a purpose. Sometimes it's just nice to forget about the future of electronic entertainment.



Vapourware

Galleon (Xbox, GameCube)

There can really only be one candidate: Toby Gard's pirate adventure. Oh, sorry, we're not supposed to call it that. Or *Tomb Raider* with ships. And tech demo without a game is probably taboo too. No really, we're still excited about this, Toby, but please can we get a game before the forthcoming destabilisation of the Middle East causes World War III. Some time in the next 12 months would be nice.




PAL VERSION
POWER
EJECT
RESET
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
06

Drinking from the Mainstream

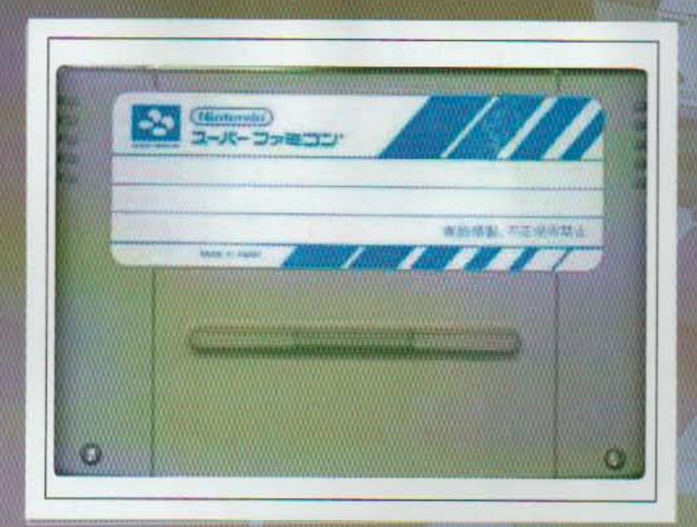
Devoid of club culture pretence or urban cool, Super Nintendo plays host to some of the most unassuming morsels of primary colour gameplay one can enjoy. Yet at the collector's party, Super Nintendo does little more than lurk in the corner clutching its dusty well-displayed trophies. **Edge** looks at the history of the system and examines how such a mainstream success story has spawned the relative niche that is Super Nintendo collecting

Edge must warn you now. Just as a multitude of fanatics will have bemoaned the exclusion of *NiGHTS* from the Saturn collector's feature, any article looking at the collector's scene revolving around the SNES will not feature *Super Mario World*. Nor, necessarily, *Zelda: A Link to the Past*. While these are titles that any self respecting games library should have in pride of place, they are of little significance to the collector's scene as they lazily fatten many a UK retailers' 'rare' retro section and can be purchased for little more than loose change. Although the collector's series is not simply about monetary value, it is inevitable that the most desirable titles fetch the highest prices.

Collectability (expressed in monetary value) measures the three-way combination of desirability, rarity and quality of any particular game and it is mainly titles that score highly in all three of these categories that are featured in this series. The SNES throws up a problem in that the majority of games that score highly in quality were never rare. The SNES is mainstream and as such, sorry tales of excellent titles slipping past the great unwashed are few and far between. If there was a great game to be played, Nintendo had the platform, power and prestige to get it to the masses. So, ironically, the SNES, the epitome of mainstream success, remains niche and embryonic in terms of its collector's scene.

As with all Nintendo's past exploits, the history of the Super Nintendo has been well documented in print. It's one of the less interesting parts of Nintendo's history because, in actuality, the company did almost everything right, or at least competently. There were no glaring managerial errors that endangered the future of videogames and, predictably, Nintendo had fantastic games that ran beautifully on well-branded safe hardware. Super Nintendo was a breeding ground for new franchises, and perhaps more than any other system, played host to the most successful updates of the famous series ever.

Shigeru Miyamoto had mastered his 2D craft and the 2D power and aesthetic completeness of the hardware precipitated games that, today, feel comfortable and self-assured in contrast to the 32bit revolution's shaky, faltering early offerings. In a sense Super Nintendo, especially in Japan, represented the mainstream culmination of the 2D way of coding. In the next step of evolution, games and the



SNES prototype carts are exceedingly difficult to find. Many are not labelled as to the contents either, so if you do stumble across one make sure to hold your breath before slotting it into your machine. A *Mario 3D* prototype would be almost priceless





Boxart for the Japanese games is, predictably, excellent, and many people collect the Japanese versions of Miyamoto-san's greatest hits for this reason alone



With a 10MHz clock frequency and rate of 100–120 polygons per second (with 16 colours) the Super FX chip allowed 3D manoeuvring not thought possible on the 16bit hardware

Prototype

There were a number of prototypes for the Super Famicom, many of them made by Nintendo itself. Probably the most famous of them was an early *Mario* game rendered in 3D using Mode 7. Miyamoto-san later stated that this was scrapped due to the hardware limitations and went on to become *Mario 64*. It's widely known there is a 99 per cent finished *Star Fox 2* in existence that was never released, not least because it was shown at a US games exhibition where a fan attempted to steal the cart (he was caught and charged). The game was of particular significance as it was the only title to use the Super FX 2 chip. There are a few EPROM carts in existence but it is unlikely that they'll ever appear on the market.

way they were perceived and played were to change dramatically almost beyond recognition. Super Nintendo was the final landmark in 20 years of Japanese 2D evolution.

In a sense, Super Famicom was the first major hardware sequel the country had seen and the choice of games, while still dwarfing today's western equivalents, was much smaller than today's bulging Japanese schedules. As such, quality games were hugely anticipated and fought for at launch. Former **Edge** editor **Jason Brookes**, speaking at the time in 'Arcade' magazine, compared the comparatively sedate launch of N64 *Zelda Ocarina of Time* with 1991's *A Link to the Past* seven years earlier. "One hapless fan, who'd failed to bag a copy of *A Link to the Past* on the day, took revenge on a friend who had by torching his house. To the ground. Also, in 1992, when the fifth instalment in the *Dragon Quest* saga was released, a queue of 12,000 fans waited patiently outside one department store, the line waving its way through Ikebukuro's streets for an astounding five kilometres. It's difficult to see Nintendo commanding such insanity again no matter how good the game."

"One fan, who'd failed to bag a copy of A Link to the Past on the day, took revenge on a friend who had by torching his house. To the ground"

Part of the problem for today's collector is Miyamoto-san. The diminutive originator had such worldwide fame and prestige that all of Nintendo's greatest in-house games were the most hotly anticipated videogames of all time, and Nintendo pushed them with all its financial weight. If Neo-Geo is known for its 2D fighters and Saturn for its shooters, then Super Famicom is ostensibly all about Miyamoto-san. But there were no limited release *Super Mario Worlds*. Even collectable titles such as *Chrono Trigger* sold over a million copies in Japan. So, if quality is rarely matched by scarcity, where does the collector go?

A launch to remember

A 16bit Nintendo system had been an on-going concern of



The Super Famicom, identical in design to the UK system. The use of an adapter allowed PAL gamers to bypass the region lockout



During the SNES years Nintendo's HQ was located on the outskirts of Kyoto. Now the company is comfortably positioned in the centre of the city in a seven-storey structure



After the success of *Donkey Kong*, *Donkey Kong Jr* and *Super Mario Bros*. Shigeru Miyamoto became a celebrity. During the '90s Nintendo used his status to push the SNES



Hiroshi Yamauchi (NCL's president) ever since he had to reduce the original Famicom to 8bit due to component costs. He had commissioned Masayuki Uemura and his R&D Division 2 team at some time in the late-'80s to begin work on the successor to the extraordinarily successful Famicom. One early prophetic concern of Yamauchi-san was that the system be backwards compatible. This was before the days when the consumer expected sequential hardware upgrades every five years. Nintendo's overbearing dominance and huge market share with Famicom filled Yamauchi-san with fear over a backlash should the new system not be able to play the previous games parents had invested in.

Uemura-san never managed to get the backwards compatibility to an affordable proposition, estimating at least $75 (£48) would be added to the basic manufacture cost of each unit, but the theory directly inspired Sony some years later. Uemura-san's focus was on generating as many colours as possible. The well-documented 32,000 colour palette (many of these hues were barely distinguishable on a standard television) of the Super Nintendo was frequently set against the Mega Drive's paltry 512, and provided much advertising fodder. For a central processor the unit used the Motorola 65816 chip and had two customised graphics chips nicknamed ppu-1 and ppu-2.

It is hard for us to understand the Japanese anticipation for the system (Super Famicom in Japan) in 1990. After seven years of videogame market definition and dominance, the release of the Super Famicom on November 21, 1990 literally brought Japan to a standstill. Nintendo had left the official announcement of the launch date very late and so pre-orders ran out as everyone panicked. Some stores required customers pay the full ¥32,000 (£169) in advance to secure a system while others simply ran a lottery system. The Osaka-based Hankyu department store announced it would accept reservations on November 3, but by November 8 had stopped taking orders.

Nintendo shipped only 300,000 consoles in what was called "Operation Midnight." This was a plan in which 100 ten-ton oversized trucks each carrying 3,000 units were used to quietly collect the stock from various secret warehouses from midnight on November 19 around Japan and make their deliveries in the early hours of the morning. The secrecy was



Cleaning teeth has never been so enjoyable… or has it? Raya's edutainment games were desperately poor proving once and for all that dentists don't make great programmers



Although some may contest the educational value of placing our children in roleplay as 'experimental surgeons', the value to the SNES completist is obvious



Nintendo was keen to attract the Game Boy demographic into investing in its more expensive parent hardware and Super Game Boy helped to do just that

Edutainment
Although collectable only to the alternative disposition Raya System's health edutainment titles are certainly some of the most interesting western SNES curios. All these games were officially licensed by Nintendo, and in fact, had a glowing endorsement. Some were available at retail while others worked in a library-lending scheme from clinics. Essentially tools to help children learn about their peculiar illnesses the titles include *Bronkie the Brontosaurus* (asthma), *Captain Novolin* (diabetes), *Packy and Marlon Health Hero* (diabetes) and *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon* (anti-smoking info). Raya Systems has since changed its name and is now known as the Health Hero Network. The games could still be ordered until recently for the European-esque price of $70 (£44) each.

employed to thwart a leaked plan that a Yakuza ring was to hijack two of the trucks and sell off the systems themselves. As a result all the 300,000 systems were at the retailers the day before the official launch.

It was clear that high drama was part of Nintendo's launch plan but much of what happened did not come from the minds of the marketing men. One store closed at 11.30am as it feared a riot. There were clearly too few units to go around and later figures released show that there were over 1.5m pre-orders for the 300,000 units. Four out of five customers went without a system including many who had already paid in full. David Sheff in his Nintendo tome 'Game Over' describes one toy store on the main street near Shakujii Koen train station in Tokyo as receiving only six units. The elderly storeowner was both frightened and embarrassed by the meagre allocation and so, instead of opening, simply posted a sign saying the family had taken a trip. Adults called in sick at work and, as a result of the traffic problems, the government asked that in future new hardware systems were only launched on weekends.

From Genesis to revelation

Within six months, 2m Super Famicom systems had been sold in Japan and over 4m were in homes within a year. The US launch was less ecstatic. Unlike the market in Japan, Sega's 16bit system had taken root and Super Nintendo's launch on September 1, 1991, despite a $25m (£16m) marketing plan, was a far more muted affair. 'Fortune' magazine reported that by the close of 1992 the Genesis (Mega Drive's US title) had sold a million systems compared to the SNES's 700,000.

In the US the Super Nintendo would slowly but surely catch up with the Mega Drive and then overtake it. In 1992 Nintendo sold 5.6m SNES systems. This was largely thanks to companies such as Rare, who was looking to capitalise on Nintendo's raw processing power as demonstrated in the 9m-seller *Donkey Kong Country*, then the second biggest selling game since *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Game Boy, with its large western installed user base inspired many more sales when the Super Game Boy add-on was released. Further successful factors included Capcom with its (initially) Nintendo exclusive *Street Fighter* games, the introduction of the Super



Importers who had mastered the *Starwing* competition cart were able to sail through the competitions in England and justify the outrageous prices they had paid for the privilege



SMB3 sold so fast on NES that it made the 'Guiness Book of Records'. Never shy of repackaging classics, Nintendo brought it back in *Mario All-Stars* for SNES in 1993



The sequel to *Star Fox* has been in ROM form on the Internet for some time now. The game was very close to being finished in 1995

20

FX chip in 1993 (as demonstrated in *Star Fox*), a huge price drop to $149 (£95) and the underground success story that was Squaresoft.

Playing an important role.

SNES collectors can conceivably be split into two groups: those who collect RPGs and those who don't. In fact, the SNES scene today would be virtually insignificant were it not for Squaresoft and its stablemates. The 16bit era was the heyday of the 2D RPG form and the hardware limitations meant innovation and good scripting were the keys to success rather than lavish FMV non-interactive set-pieces.

The history of the Japanese RPG is interesting and significant. In 1976, Henk Rogers, a Dutch US immigrant and graduate, moved from a safe job with the US military in California to study Japanese in Yokohama. In between teaching English and working for his father's gem business, Rogers had found time to code his own unique version of US campus favourite 'Dungeons and Dragons' on his PC. He named his title *Black Onyx* as he intended to sell the game to the Japanese for a small fortune.

Rogers found an interested publisher, who then, at the point of signing, tried to pay less than previously agreed for the software. Rogers decided instead to market and sell the game himself and so took out advertisements in the Japanese videogames press and waited, with his wife acting as a secretary, for the calls. With only three calls in three months, Rogers realised he needed to actively educate the Japanese as to what an RPG entailed. Marching into one of the main offices of a leading videogames magazine, he set up his game on the editor's PC and explained the concept to the staff. Rogers' contagious enthusiasm caught and as the writers got to grips with levelling up their onscreen representations, he left satisfied that his game had received a fair airing.

The magazine reviewed *Black Onyx* with a glowing appraisal and Rogers sold 100,000 copies in 1980. Bullet Proof software, the company Rogers set up, was the originator of the RPG revolution in Japan. By the time of the Super Famicom, the Japanese had, in typical fashion, taken the concept from Rogers (itself a bastardised Tolkien-esque concept), made it their own and mastered the creation



Terranigma is highly sought after by collectors and RPG aficionados alike. The quality combined with rarity and demand have pushed the price of the cart above the rarer *Whirly*



Gumpei Yokoi's *Metroid* series has never sold well in Japan. Two years ago Edge found an Akihabara store selling four new, boxed copies of Super Metroid for just ¥1,100 (£6)



The blocky design of the US hardware eschewed the curves and design subtlety of the Japanese and PAL releases. However, US machines are desirable as the 'tabs' inside the cart slot can be broken and Japanese games freely played: a trait shared by the N64

25

process better than anyone else in the world. RPGs were where the big money was in Japan and in many ways they were responsible for attracting a far wider Japanese demographic than Mario ever would.

Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* series had fast been gathering momentum since the first instalment in 1987. Despite meagre sales of the first game (just over 12,000 copies according to 'Weekly Famitsu') the second and third games had sold increasingly well and were attracting many of Enix's *Dragon Quest* fanatics. In 1990 the *Dragon Quest* sequels had netted several hundred million dollars a piece in Japan but had no market share in the US. In 1990, three years after initial release, Squaresoft launched the first *Final Fantasy* game for the NES in the States. The second and third games for the NES never secured release in the US and so the US *Final Fantasy II* for Super Nintendo was actually a port of *Final Fantasy IV* in Japan.

US Squaresoft executives were unsure as to how consumers would react to these 'complicated' adventure games (ironic as they basically originated from the US) and so commissioned their own staff to come up with an RPG-lite *Final Fantasy* game: *Mystic Quest*. The game was a disaster in every way and it is testament to the strength of titles such as *Final Fantasy III*, *Secret of Mana* and *Chrono Trigger* that Squaresoft's branding was not damaged irreparably.

Europe was not so lucky. These were the days before *Final Fantasy VII* (see p108) blew open the cultural export/import that was the Japanese RPG to Europe.

This un-asserted marketability coupled with the age-old problems of diverse languages in the European continent meant that all bar one of Squaresoft's finest 16bit outings were left in the US (*Seiken Densetsu 2*/*Secret of Mana*). As a result, these titles easily fetch the most out of the general release (ie non-prototype/competition carts) in today's UK collectors market and have been responsible for attracting huge swathes of collectors to the scene.

Squaresoft's US office apparently never learned its lesson from *Mystic Quest* and reportedly decided to pull the port of *Seiken Densetsu 3*, the sequel to *Secret of Mana*, despite a near complete translation from the critically acclaimed Japanese original. Instead it again commissioned its teams (reportedly to get its coders on the map) with designing a US-



A complete set of US Squaresoft 16bit titles will set you back a fair amount. Mint boxes with maps and instructions sell for huge amounts both in the UK and US

Multinational heart

To prove that Nintendo isn't simply all about profits, in 1992 it joined with the Starlight Children's foundation to provide entertainment for hospitalised children. In a program that is still running today, Nintendo commissioned the building of standalone television/VCR and Super Nintendo units that could be wheeled around wards to children's beds. It's a scheme that has worked exceptionally well in the US (where the new GameCube units are installed) and recent studies have shown that the demand for Fun Centers is increasing rapidly. There is no scheme like this in the UK as yet. More information can be found at www.starlight.org



Squaresoft's Japanese catalogue in all its inaccessible glory. Many collectors want the original versions of Square's earliest games and while the market has tailed off slightly in the last few years, they can at least play the translated ROMs with a clear conscience



Nintendo's Fun Centers provide a breath of fresh air in the profit/sequel-minded trends of the videogames industry at large

centric RPG using the *Chrono Trigger* engine. Fans were outraged and the pitiful release of *Secret of Evermore* was no compensation for *Secret of Mana 3*'s absence from the release schedule. In a cruel twist, both *Secret of Evermore* and *Final Fantasy Mystic Quest* were released in the UK.

Edge spoke to two of the scene's hardcore enthusiasts to gain some insight into the world of the Super Nintendo fan. **Bryan Paton** runs the Super Famicom Central fansite (www.sfamicom.fsnet.co.uk) while **Patrick Anderson** manages the online undercutting import store Rising Sun (www.rsdm.co.uk). Both men bought their machines in early 1991 following the Japanese launch (Paton complains that limited supplies and huge import prices explain a two-month delay for him). Similarly, both have been deeply involved in buying and selling Super Famicom rarities.

"When I realised there were people parting with large sums of money for games I'd assumed were worthless I realised the power of the market"

Edge starts by inquiring how they got first entered the scene. "By the late-'90s the Super Famicom scene had almost all but died due to the combination of next-generation systems and emulation," says Paton. "After searching the Internet and only being able to find ROM sites about the machine, I became surprised at the lack of information available for other fans, so that is when I decided to start Super Famicom Central. At first it was really just a showcase for the machine and the items in my own collection, but quite soon it became apparent lots of people were looking to buy and sell Super Famicom games and merchandise. So I offered, with the site, a base for people to be able to do this and also hoped to provide information and answers to any of their questions."

Anderson stumbled into the scene more unwittingly. "When I realised there were people parting with large sums of money for games I'd assumed were worthless I realised the extent and power of the retro market. People made offers for games I couldn't refuse, so I began buying and selling certain

Translating the classics

Collectors of SNES RPGs will be well aware of the burgeoning fan translation scene. For many years now fans have been translating leftfield Japanese anime hits too financially risky for western publishers to bother with and it's a phenomenon that's stretched to SNES titles. With the advent of excellent SNES emulators combined with knowledgeable bilingual 16bit RPG fans, subtitled Squaresoft and Enix gems are available to the less linguistically educated. The most famous of the fan translations is undoubtedly the excellent *Seiken Densetsu 3* (the sequel to *Secret of Mana*) where the care and skill demonstrated in communicating plot subtleties rivals Ted Woosley's original *Final Fantasy VI* work. More recently translations of *Bahamut Lagoon*, *Front Mission* and the early *Dragon Quest* games have all been completed opening up valuable avenues of videogaming history previously unexplored for the inquisitive. Google away.







The explosion of the anime scene into children's prime time has driven up the values of most tie-in games across all platforms



ASCII pad variations have been on the Japanese market for many years and the SFC is home to some of the most interesting examples

32



Super Mario RPG was perhaps the only time Squaresoft will ever develop a title hand in hand with Nintendo. This US version signed by Miyamoto-san would fetch a very high pric

titles on eBay. Having said that, I'd rather view a game like *Yoshi's Island* as the second best 2D platform game ever made, than a potential £30."

Edge wonders which machine wins the 16bit race in today's collector market. "Well, I don't believe the Mega Drive has overtaken the Super Famicom in collector's terms," says Paton. "I don't think it ever needed to. The Mega Drive has always been collected more due to the basic fact that it is a Sega machine. Just look at eBay. Constantly in the top ten most popular searches is Dreamcast, not bad for such a so-called failed piece of hardware. I think Sega is more popular for collectors due to their consoles' (Mega Drive, Saturn, DC) arcade roots. And now of course with Nintendo's continuing success, and Sega's demise, in the home hardware market, this points to an even bigger demand for Sega's systems and software."

But why is the SNES the weapon of choice for some collectors today? "As people get older they reminisce about games from their past. With old-style gameplay scarely produced today, it means the Super Famicom is the ideal place for people to find it. Being such a popular machine at the time, lots of the games and the hardware is still available cheaply, so it is not difficult for someone to get started. It is only once you want to own the rarer items that you begin to talk about serious money. For all the advancements in graphics and sound, gameplay is still the most important ingredient. Add to that the fact that many of today's top games series were actually born on the Super Famicom players want to go back and own/play the originals."

"As people get older they reminisce about games. With old-style gamepla scarely produced today, the SFC is the ideal place for people to find it"

Anderson is in agreement. "As a gaming platform, the SNES/Super Famicom saw many videogame creators hitting a high that has yet to be matched. Romantic nostalgia? Some might say so, but there are countless mid-20 to early-30-year-old gamers who would agree that the SNES versions



Street Fighter II was one of the most expensive videogames ever. Import prices were laughable at the time, often pushing over £100



The stunning conversion opened up the world of 2D fighting to the west and proved to the masses that you didn't need SNK-branded hardware to enjoy arcade-quality fighting



In 1996 Bandai struck a deal with Nintendo to produce its own add-on for the SFC. The cart adapter allowed Bandai's own Turbo carts to be used with the SFC as the base



This dedicated pachinko controller will still fetch very high prices in Japan and is understandably far more collectable there than for the western importer

of *Mario Kart* and *Star Fox* and *Street Fighter II*, for example, are the superior iterations. I do think the system has increased in popularity, probably due to people who had it first time round rediscovering the system and latecomers to the videogame scene wanting to educate/inform themselves of what came before (in around a 70/30 ratio).

So which are the titles that the Super Famicom collectors want the most? Both collectors have many examples each occupying its own niche. "In America, anime and manga tie-in games are becoming increasingly popular. This is one if the reasons that the *Dragonball Z*, as well as other manga-based games, are so highly sought after. Prices for manga-based games in good condition have increased in value greatly in a short period of time recently," says Paton.

"Of course there is also the RPG. The Super Famicom has so many stunning RPGs that this has become an area that some collectors solely focus on. RPGs that never saw English translation are always desirable for the hardened collector who wants rarity, but RPGs that did translate and sold well are also very collectable both in translated and Japanese forms as people want to own the game in its original release format. The *Final Fantasy* and *Mana* series are also hugely collectable and can demand high sale prices, so definitely it has to be RPGs that are the hot western items."

Special releases

As with all collectable consoles, special release versions of the hardware are sought after. "On the hardware front it has to be the Bandai Satellaview and of course the more cart games you can get hold of, the better. After all, there is no other way of playing things like *F-Zero 2*, *BS Zelda* (new dungeons) *Excitebike* and many others. The Sufami Turbo by Bandai is also sought after, not for its quality but more for its small distribution and lack of released games, plus being able to link to carts together seems to intrigue people.

"Finally there are the limited releases that the hardened Nintendo collectors are after. People will pay a lot of money for titles like the last official game released, *Fire Emblem 776* (September 1, 1999) The standard version is rare and sells for around £60–70, but there was also a limited edition box set released in small numbers which is hugely sought after. In Japan there were also a few unofficial releases, not pirate

Super Nintendo: Tech specs

Processor: 16bit 65c816
Processor speed: 1.79, 2.68 or 3.58Mhz
RAM memory: 128K
Video RAM: 64K
Resolution: 512 x 448 pixels
Colours: 32,768
Colours onscreen: 256
Max Sprites: 128
Sprite size: 8 x 8 to 63 x 64
Sound chip: 8bit Sony SPC 700
Sound channels: 8
Controller response time: 16m/s



Released in March 1995 the Satellaview is one of videogaming's most interesting add-ons. Using a Japanese satellite system 'St.GIGA' to get its information you could download and save in a 1Mb RAM Cartridge updates of new games between 4pm and 7pm



Finding a mint boxed Satellaview in this condition is a very hard exercise. For those who have to have one – bear in mind it is useless today. A museum piece if ever there was one



Stunt Race FX was one of the first SNES titles to use the Super FX chip. While it may look primitive by today's standards, the game's vibrant 3D universe was a selling point in 1993

copies of games but actual games produced by small companies that knew they wouldn't get Nintendo's approval for release, so they released the games themselves.

Most of these titles were hentai games and do fetch quite a lot of money when up for sale (they do come with boxes and instructions, but most of them are in black and white with no artwork). The strange thing about collecting Super Famicom games, is that the more obscure, and therefore lesser imported, Japanese titles, in general are not worth much at all, but the most popular games such as *Secret of Mana*, that no doubt sold lots more copies seem to be rarer and more sought after. That is the opposite, in my experience, of collecting many of the other systems.

Edge wonders if the Super Famicom scene is set to blossom or simply fade away? Anderson is undecided, "That depends on how many of the up and coming gamers are interested in discovering the Super Famicom. As the older players complete their collections or get mortgages (yes, the two are mutually incompatible), that part of the market vanishes. Whether sufficient interest will remain after that is anyone's guess. To be honest I hope so, but suspect not."

Paton takes the polar opposite line, "At the moment Super Famicom collecting is still a small area of the games market, but it has been growing steadily over the last two years. The release of GameCube actually boosted the popularity of the Super Famicom. Watching prices and listening to demand has shown me that the Super Famicom is a classic home console from the golden age of videogaming and will always hold a healthy corner of the collector's market. The system will definitely remain collectable due to the sheer size of the game catalogue and merchandise available. The fact is that the original Famicom is still highly collectable now and is seven years older than the Super Famicom. I don't see the passing of years relegating the system any further. The system itself broke too much ground and had too many special games simply to be swept up and lost in time."

At the most recent count the Super Nintendo system had sold over 46m units worldwide. After the final release in 1999 it was reported that 377.5m games had been sold (not including secondhand titles) with *Super Mario World* selling over 18m of these.

Price guide

The SNES collector's scene is more transient than most. While stalwarts such as *Final Fantasy III* and *Secret of Mana* command stale prices, most of the rare Japanese titles vary massively in ending price from auction to auction. Rare and excellent titles such as *Actraiser 2*, *Whirly* and *Metal Warriors* can be bought for very little if you pick the right week. Towards the end of the Super Famicom's life titles were sold for a large amount at retail in Japan and so profit for original importers is scarce (eg *Seiken Denstsu 3* retailed at ¥11,400 (£60)). It is worth noting that some chains (CEX included) are prohibited from selling all imported Nintendo stock from GameCube right back to Famicom. As always the best deals are to be had on the Internet buying directly from US or Japanese suppliers. The prices quoted below are an indication only.

Chrono Trigger





US version: £70–100
Japanese version: £15–25
Original release: 11/03/95
Developer/Publisher: Square/Squaresoft

While the Japanese version sold over a million copies, the US conversion is relatively rare, of a high quality and highly sought after.

Final Fantasy II





US version: £80–100
Japanese version: (easy-type) £30–40
Original release: 19/07/91
Developer/Publisher: Square/Squaresoft

The US conversion of the Japanese *Final Fantasy IV* was dumbed down and censored and is very hard to find in good condition with all maps, etc.

Final Fantasy III





US version: £70–100
Japanese version: £30–40
Original release: 02/04/94
Developer/ Publisher: Square/Squaresoft

Unboxed this will be worth a fraction of this price, but in mint condition Square's best pre-32bit epic is a jewel in any crown (*FFVI* in Japan).

Earthbound/Mother 2





US version: £40–60
Japanese version: £20–40
Original release: 27/08/94
Developer/Publisher: Ape Studios/ Nintendo

The dry self-deprecating parody of Japanese RPGs in *Earthbound* is lost on many young Americans (see gamefaqs) but it is both hilarious and polished.

Super Mario RPG





US version: £50–80
Japanese version: £15–25
Original release: 09/03/96
Developer/Publisher: Square/Nintendo

This was the only time the two great companies collaborated in coding. And the rip-roaring story has lost none of its shine.

Dragonball Z Hyper Dimension





European version: £45–60
Japanese version: £35–45
Original release: 29/03/96
Developer/Publisher: Bandai

For once an expensive *Dragonball* game that plays well. Regarded by many as the best videogame iteration from the franchise.

Akamajou Dracula XX





Japanese version: £50–80
Original release: 21/07/95
Developer/Publisher: Konami

A rare port of the PC Engine version this game was panned by fans. It's still one of the most highly sought after *Castlevania* games, however.

Kikikaikai/Pocky and Rocky





US/UK version: £15–25
Japanese version: £35–50
Original release: 22/12/92
Developer/Publisher: Natsume/Nintendo

All the titles in the *Kikikaikai* stable are brilliant 2D fun and this is best in twoplayer mode. The Japanese version is always collectable.

Yoshi's Island





US/UK version: £15–20
Japanese version: £30–40
Original release: 05/08/95
Developer/Publisher: Nintendo

Miyamoto-san's directional change for the *Mario* series provided a last slice of beautiful 2D coding before the world went 64bit.

Terranigma





UK version: £55–100
Japanese version: £25–35
Original release: 20/10/95
Developer/Publisher: Enix

At last: a rare quality RPG title the Europeans got that the US didn't. Finding a complete version of Enix's game on ebay will prove difficult.

Continued >

Rendering Ranger R2





Japanese version: £90–120
Original release: 17/11/95
Developer/Publisher: Rainbow Arts/Virgin

Multidirectional scrolling action shooter. Five upgradeable weapons and a varied level system make for a sought after title that rivals Treasure's finest.

Final Fight Tough





Japanese version: £40–55
Original release: 22/12/95
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

The third and final 2D *Final Fight* game on SNES is perhaps the most controversial. Fans either love or hate it but it still attracts high prices.

UFO Kamen Yakisoban





Japanese version: £35–45
Original release: 14/10/94
Developer/Publisher: Den 'Z

This cart was only available by saving up stickers on packages of Nissin Foods' UFO Yakisoba. You'll encounter Chopstick Woman, Mister Fork and the Pie Men.

Fire Emblem 5 Tracchia 776





Japanese limited edition: £90–130
Original release: 01/09/99
Developer/Publisher: Intelligent Systems

The limited edition of the last official SNES game is popular for obvious reasons. It's a tribute to Gumpei Yokoi's team that the series remains so compelling after his death.

Bahamut Lagoon





Japanese version: £35–50
Original release: 09/02/96
Developer/Publisher: Squaresoft

One of Square's best strategy RPGs this can even hold a candle to *Final Fantasy Tactics*. The dragon feeding elements were innovative and the story compelling.

Front Mission





Japanese version: £30–50
Original release: 24/02/95
Developer/Publisher: Square/Squaresoft

The first in the series is considered by many to be the best. Playable in Japanese format and collectable thanks to Amano artwork.

Secret of Mana/ Seiken Densetsu 2





US/UK version: £50–70
Japanese version: £20–30
Original release: 06/08/93
Developer/Publisher: Square/Squaresoft

One of the few quality RPGs to make it to the UK in the SNES era this is the 16bit action RPG as it should be: quirky, slick and full of character.

Super Metroid





US/UK version: £20–35
Japanese version: £35–45
Original release: 19/03/94
Developer/Publisher: Nintendo

The English language option, quality packaging and poor homeland sales make the Japanese version the most desirable. Rising in price since *Prime*.

R-Type III





Japanese version: £30–45
Original release: 10/12/93
Developer/Publisher: Irem

A stunning Super Nintendo-only update for Irem's horizontal flagship and a beautifully tough and crafted experience.

Harvest Moon/Bokujou Monogatari





US/UK release: £40–55
Japanese version: £15–25
Original release: 09/08/96
Developer/Publisher: Pack-In-Video

This RPG/dating/farm 'em up started the roller rolling for many who had never before considered growing carrots before.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Eternal Darkness

Admittedly the camera isn't so clever, but the plotting, mood and structure is masterful. *Eternal Darkness* is a great alternative for those tired of Capcom's RE series.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

"Check the map, guys!" "To the left!" "Inside the building!" "Top-right window!" "I'll take the stairs!" "Cover the exit!" ... BANG!! "Enemy down." Bliss.



(Xbox) Ubi Soft

Ico

Not the easiest game to find at retail nowadays, *Ico* is still capable of beguiling the most cold-hearted gamer. The story and mood is poetic, the ending disturbing.



(PlayStation2) SCEA

DoA Xtreme Beach Volleyball

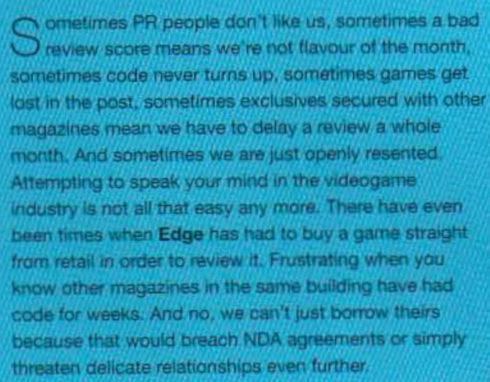
After delivering this charming antidote to guns and violence gaming where next for Team Ninja? **Edge** is hoping for the *DoA* high school prom dating sim.



(Xbox) Tecmo

The late review?

The truth about videogame PR



Sometimes PR people don't like us, sometimes a bad review score means we're not flavour of the month, sometimes code never turns up, sometimes games get lost in the post, sometimes exclusives secured with other magazines mean we have to delay a review a whole month. And sometimes we are just openly resented. Attempting to speak your mind in the videogame industry is not all that easy any more. There have even been times when **Edge** has had to buy a game straight from retail in order to review it. Frustrating when you know other magazines in the same building have had code for weeks. And no, we can't just borrow theirs because that would breach NDA agreements or simply threaten delicate relationships even further.

The point of all this is that **Edge** is not out to upset people. Whether you are a developer, a publisher, a PR rep or a consumer the **Edge** rating system remains 'strict' because gamers have been let down too often by hyped reviews and the kind of mass delusion brought about by big marketing spends. You can imagine the kind of fallout **Edge** gets when games such as *Rayman 3* and *Indiana Jones and The Emperor's Tomb* get universally glowing praise, then we give them much lower scores. Another case of **Edge**'s jaded attitude?

If **Edge** is jaded, it's jaded with the amount of software being produced that singularly fails to excite or entertain. Or worse, contains broken cameras, badly constructed levels or a save-point structure that sees you traversing the same digital landscape repeatedly. We are always conscious that these games cost £40, and as such need to cause delight not provoke apoplectic fits.

In truth, it's only a couple of companies that don't understand **Edge**, the majority taking low review scores with a magnanimous shrug of the shoulders. In most cases **Edge** will get game reviews to you before most other UK magazines. The only exception to this is when heavy translation is required (in which case we'll wait for the US or PAL version) or when review code mysteriously doesn't arrive. Ideally, publishers would be desperate to get their latest games into our publication, but in reality **Edge** has to work harder to retain good relations with PRs than most. Whatever the case, expect a feature exploring the cloistered world of games PR in **E**124.













The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), May (UK)**







Well, what would *you* use a giant leaf for? (top). Finally: you can smash crockery (above centre). The bow brings up a firstperson view (above)



To those already familiar with the *Legend of Zelda* titles – and it must be assumed that around 99 per cent of **Edge** readers will be intimately aware of one of the most exceptional game series of all time – *The Wind Waker* will seem like an old friend you haven't seen for a few years. It's all there: the whimsical storyline, the range of equipment that gradually becomes available as you work your way through countless challenges, the stack of puzzle-based dungeons whose intricacies will have you pulling your hair out one minute only to curse your apparently obvious lack of foresight the next.

But the appearance of this acquaintance has drastically changed. No longer is he simply making nods towards cartoons: he now *is* a cartoon, with the most outrageously controversial cel-shaded appearance imaginable. For the first few minutes it seems a little strange. Then, when you begin to get your teeth into the things that really matter, it fades into absolute insignificance.

Which is not to say that *The Wind Waker*'s presentational style is wholly successful. There is, for example, some disparity among its brain-bogglingly large amount of visual components. Link himself is never less than perfectly realised as a wide-eyed hero-in-the-making, but the other characters populating his unusual world do not seem to have been borne of a common template. Townsfolk, for instance, have much in common with those of the N64 games, their slightly pointy features and bland expressions giving them a primitive flavour that is significantly pronounced when you encounter enemy creatures whose appearance owes much to Hollywood's animation work over the last decade, their mouths flobbing open to reveal sets of gums and teeth, lending them genuine panache. In contrast, the characters you routinely meet in more pedestrian moments appear as simple cardboard cutouts.

"Link himself is never less than perfectly realised, but the other characters do not appear to have been borne of a common template"



The grappling hook is used both on land and in conjunction with your boat as a crane device

Previously in **E**112, **E**116







Pirate outposts (above) are dotted all over the world. Visiting them is by no means necessary – but who can resist the temptation of treasure chests to plunder? Link uses a spin attack to shrug off some decidedly sticky enemies (left). This flower (far left) may look attractive in an exotic sort of way, but it is in fact a boss

But at least there are no unsettling conflicts in the way the action is presented: you'll see nothing like the QuicktimeVR-style marketplace section of *Ocarina of Time*, as *The Wind Waker*'s world is a much more cohesive whole. And that ranges from the typical land-based sections to the sea-based excursions whose existence delivers the game's significant Other Big Thing.

Nautical undertakings are massively important: this *Zelda* is as much about traversing distances as it is anything else. Everything centres on activities conducted on land masses, but getting to and from the game's many islands as you seek to gain clues and new power-ups can prove something of a chore. There's no doubt that sea-based activity has been imbued with much care and attention on Nintendo's part (sea swells are dynamically rendered in magnificent fashion, while gulls and fish lend enormous peripheral atmosphere), but, as you make your way to what you know is going to be another massively entertaining dungeon section, you cannot help but resent simply pointing your boat in the right direction and letting the wind do its work in taking you there. Of course, being a Nintendo game there is much to do on the open sea, including battling giant squid, fishing for treasure using your grappling hook (and help from special maps), firing bombs at hostile pirate enemies, and simply mapping your way around the massive gameworld.

While sea-based action feels convincingly organic, though, it can somehow feel artificial, especially when you're charged with to-ing and fro-ing between places in what appears to simply be an effort to prolong the game's duration. There *is* a warp facility that takes you between significant locations in an instant, but even then there remains an awful lot of relatively dull seafaring activity.

But that's the negativity pretty much out of the way. In just about every other respect, *The Wind Waker* is another Nintendo classic.



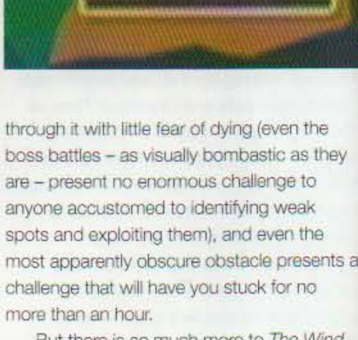
Post officer

Edge will not apologise for being slightly sceptical about *The Wind Waker*'s quality upon initial inspection – but then that's completely forgivable when the first minigame offered up is a simplistic take on 'Battleships'. Later diversions deliver more complex and rewarding diversions, however, including a full 3D interpretation of the 'Battleships' theme. Strangely, however, **Edge** was particularly drawn to the game's post-sorting challenge (above), which boils down to simple shape recognition at speed and swift reflexes in order to garner reward. Try it – **Edge** vouches for its addictiveness.















The Wind Waker's world is filled with unusual islands and craggy features (top left). Clearly, uncovering their secrets is massively rewarding. The game's strong visuals are illustrated by simple swaying grass (above)

Waking the wind

Once you've collected the Wind Waker (a magical baton whose purpose mirrors that of the eponymous musical instrument from *Ocarina of Time*), you will use it to command the direction of the gameworld's wind in accordance with a compass. Without the wind (or, indeed, a sail for your boat), Link isn't going anywhere. Later, the Wind Waker is used to bring about all manner of other magical goings-on, and it's fundamental to a dungeon that owes a great deal to *Ico*.

The *Zelda* series has always shone in terms of level design, and *The Wind Waker* follows the grand tradition. Each dungeon has unique aspects that make use of particular items of equipment and weaponry, and there are a number of hurdles whose logic initially appears to have come from some alien form of thinking but which eventually makes you simply smile.

This is no *Ocarina* in terms of difficulty, though. Compared to that game, in fact, it is positively generous: pots and swathes of grass contain power-ups that'll have you back to full power in no time, and there is nothing to touch the N64's Water Temple in terms of required concentration level. Each dungeon is, in fact, more focused on individual components than those of *Ocarina*: rather than thinking about rooms as part a whole, you experience them more as self-contained challenges, wondering how that moveable block might help your chances of making it to the platform at the end of the room as opposed to how its position might affect what would happen if you dropped into this area from above, for example.

Is *The Wind Waker* a game for those new to the *Zelda* series, then? In some respects, yes, it is. Veterans will make their way through it with little fear of dying (even the boss battles – as visually bombastic as they are – present no enormous challenge to anyone accustomed to identifying weak spots and exploiting them), and even the most apparently obscure obstacle presents a challenge that will have you stuck for no more than an hour.

But there is so much more to *The Wind Waker* than progressing through dungeons. The game is simply enormous, and it contains more diversions and subquests than possibly any other title. And that's perhaps its biggest strength: it presents a world in which you can be absorbed as little or as much as you like. Find the camera and focus on working out its nuances and rewards. Go treasure hunting out at sea and don't stop

"Compared to Ocarina, it is positively generous: pots and swathes of grass contain power-ups that have you back up to full strength in no time"



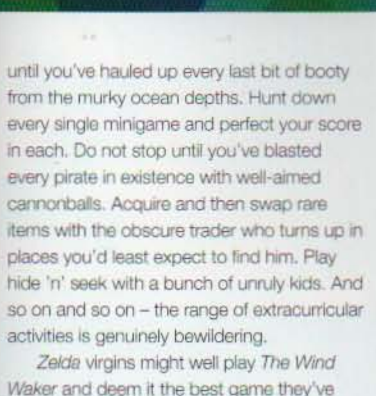






until you've hauled up every last bit of booty from the murky ocean depths. Hunt down every single minigame and perfect your score in each. Do not stop until you've blasted every pirate in existence with well-aimed cannonballs. Acquire and then swap rare items with the obscure trader who turns up in places you'd least expect to find him. Play hide 'n' seek with a bunch of unruly kids. And so on and so on – the range of extracurricular activities is genuinely bewildering.

Zelda virgins might well play *The Wind Waker* and deem it the best game they've ever encountered. To those of us who already have an idea of what to expect, though, it's 'merely' brilliant.



Edge rating: **Nine** out of **ten**





The Wind Waker **makes obvious tips of the hat to previous games in the series – the Deku Tree (above right) puts in a relatively early appearance. Snow? In a *Zelda* title (above)? It's one of many things that will be unfamiliar to fans. Facial animation detail ranges, but Link's expression usually tells a story (main)**

Chaos Legion

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Capcom Developer: In-house Price: ¥6,800 (£36) Release: Out now (Japan), September (UK) Previously in E117, E121

Remember *Gauntlet*? Remember how Midway fundamentally failed to translate the exalted 2D experience into 3D? Well if it's vigorous and unceasing demon-slaying that you're after then *Chaos Legion* fits the bill. There's the emphasis on a hack 'n' slash game mechanic, creature hordes, monster generators and health-boost pick-ups. But *Chaos Legion* has been robbed of that essential multiplayer element and is a shallower experience as a result.

Structurally the game is as simple as they come: there are no switches to pull, keys to locate or alternate paths. As one gate opens another closes, as 30 monstrosities are massacred, another 30 appear. Hacking (or shooting with Alicia Winslet) is assigned to one button, though a basic combo is unleashed if you get the timing just right. So overwhelming are the odds against the hero, Sieg Wahrheit, that he must call upon demon guardians to help him slay the minions of his white-haired adversary and fan of the mumbo-jumbo one-liner, Victor Delacroix.

Although the six Legion types (a seventh can be unlocked): Guilt, Malice, Arrogance, Flawed, Blasphemy and Hatred add a degree of strategy to the combat it's a weaker facet than **Edge** was expecting. The L1 button summons your selected Legion for a limited time, while the triangle button triggers its special ability. For example, the Malice Legion has a cross-bow weapon that's most effective against flying foes. Intermissions showing battle statistics allow you to upgrade your Legion powers. It is here where the game transcends *Golden Axe* simplicity by letting you assign experience points to a number of defensive and offensive abilities.

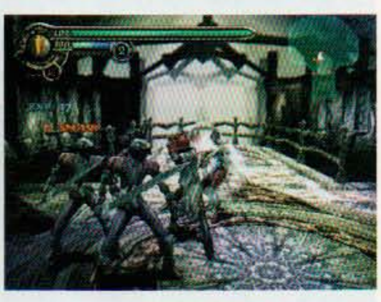
Unfortunately, the repetitive nature of the combat is only transformed by this feature in the latter stages when things become a little harder. The enemies show little intelligence and as a result combat feels functional rather than thrilling. Destroying monster generators with Legion blitz attacks is the best strategy, and beyond the boss battles there's little to transform this from decent to distinguished.

Indeed, *Chaos Legion* suffers from the same lack of fizz that pervaded *DMC2*. Beautiful, polished and at times engaging Capcom's latest invention, nevertheless, tests neither the reactions nor the brain enough to hold your interest. There's nothing wrong with hack 'n' slash adventures but *Chaos Legion* isn't as sharp as it should be.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









The monsters in *Chaos Legion* are nothing if not bizarre. A mixture of reptilian freaks, crustacean monstrosities and more traditional demons, there's enough variety to keep you entertained. Experienced gamers will probably find things more satisfying on the harder difficulty setting





Titanic struggle

Go through the game once (a feat that takes around five hours) and you'll unlock Alicia Winslet. Although **Edge**'s Japanese is still a little weak, it's clear from the hysterical cut-scenes that she's a girl with a monumental grudge against Delacroix. Winslet's special attack is magnificent – a 360-degree bullet-spewing rotation followed by a powered-up cannon shot that sends her tumbling backwards. However, her lack of Legion powers makes her journey less interesting than Wahrheit's.





Pick-ups include life force and 'soul' capsules that will replenish their respective status bars. Soul energy is required to launch your Legion attacks. Legions can also be switched to defensive or offensive duties

Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), September (UK)** Previously in **E112, E117**









Once again, the ratio of action to cut-scenes is rather slight, but unlike the original *ZOE*, the preponderance of monodynamic bosses simply compounds the feeling of circumscription. In fact it rarely matches its predecessor in any respect









In action, the game is undeniably pretty, as long as you can stomach the monstrous camera. But beyond the anime-inspired visuals, the action limps turgidly along without ever really engaging or entertaining

A PAL to the end

In a rare bit of good news for European gamers, Konami has announced that the PAL version of *The 2nd Runner* will ship with several extra features. Whether these will be substantial enough to alter dramatically the game's quality we'll have to wait until its September release to see, but it's commendable that the European version of the game will include a number of exclusives. In all, three wholly new levels, two substantially revised levels, "seven graphical demos" (whatever that might mean), and two additional difficulty modes will be introduced.

Playing *The 2nd Runner* is purgatorial. Which is surprising, because the original *ZOE* frequently erred on the side of the divine during its all too brief lifespan. Not that *The 2nd Runner* has substantially improved upon the brevity of its predecessor (although it is a marginally longer game), but it has significantly stepped up the difficulty level. Unfortunately though, it has done so on an arbitrary basis, with the forking mission structure of the original giving way to the sort of boss-heavy composition that characterises the game's stablemate, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, though without any of the panache. Indeed it's remarkable that nearly all of the strongest features of the original *ZOE* have been disposed of, because the new additions are, by and large, pretty disappointing.

For a start, whereas combat was balletic in *ZOE*, in *The 2nd Runner* it's simply spastic. A lurching lock-on system sends the camera careering wildly whenever you switch targets and consequently robs combat of any spatial continuity. Which is bizarre because the targeting lock system worked fine in *ZOE*. Combat has also been complicated by the inclusion of a dash weapon, theoretically capable of taking out multiple targets, but practically hampered by the dodgy camera.

And the fighting is further undermined by the enlarged scope of subweapons. Again, in theory, these can be cycled through to provide relief for specific situations (such as slowing down speedy enemies, or piercing enemy shields) but in practice, they're redundant on two counts. The first is that the basic subweapon, grab, is almost always the most useful, whatever the circumstance. The second is that your onboard AI, ADA, can, over the course of play, start to automatically choose 'appropriate' subweapons automatically. It's a bit like a futuristic version of Word's paperclip assistant but – if you can imagine this – even more annoying.

Also annoying is the shift towards a boss-heavy structure. Quite apart from curtailing the freedom offered by the original *ZOE*, bosses in *The 2nd Runner* are rather limp compared to their forebears, requiring patience rather than any degree of skill. And then there are those long cut-scenes, offering the same, inexplicably convoluted, plotting that characterises other *ZOE* titles.

So in spite of the game's visual splendour, it's a bitter disappointment compared to its predecessor.

Edge rating: **Four** out of **ten**

Dark Cloud 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **Level 5** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**112

The original *Dark Cloud* was all about town planning, and yet it was never simply a boring geography lesson: by delving ever deeper into randomly generated dungeons it was possible to retrieve people and buildings with which to repopulate a local town. The thoughtful placement of said people and architecture generated new items and incentives for further dungeon delving, which in turn generated new people and buildings. And so on. There was nothing that got in the way of this circular sequence of incentivisation, though with the inclusion of an elegant weapon upgrade system and several minigames, the result was an enjoyable title.

This combination of town management and dungeon exploration continues to be the defining characteristic of the sequel, with a greater degree of presentational polish thrown in for good measure. Which is the good news. The bad news is the inclusion of several layers of complication which aren't wholly welcome.

The first of these layers is an increased emphasis on narrative. Granted, the plot of *Dark Cloud* wasn't its strongest point, and there was significant scope for improvement. But the introduction of countless (and endless) cut-scenes and abridging sequences featuring character control without actual play ends up suffocating the core part of the game. Indeed the town management element doesn't appear until some five or six hours have elapsed.

When it is finally does emerge, this component is no longer a case of simply finding buildings or people and arranging them in a town. Instead, it requires players to find the blueprints of buildings, then finding enough components with which to build them, and then populating them with people from your home town, who need to be attracted to your cause by the completion of tedious and lengthy subquests. Which essentially increases the incidence of aimless wandering, losing the tight focus that proved so attractive in the previous title.

And while the return of fishing or the addition of a golf-like minigame are welcome, a new photography system adds yet more tedium to your travels, requiring further prolonged wandering in the often futile hope of capturing an image that will secure a 'scoop' or contribute to a new invention.

Dark Cloud 2 still has merit, but it's simply not enjoyable as the first game.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









A new photography subgame allows photos to be used to create inventions, but it actually adds little to the mix apart from overcomplication



When the game eventually gets going, it's almost as much fun as its predecessor. It's just that it takes several hours to kick off. Still, the urban planning and basic dungeon crawling broadly remain intact

Déjà entendu

The following appeared in **Edge**'s review of the original *Dark Cloud*: "The shrill pan pipe tweeness that dogs your progress will have you stoppering your ears after just a few hours, and by the time the game reaches its conclusion you will be cursing the lunatic responsible." Judging by the shrill pan pipe tweeness that continues to dog your progress in the sequel, it would appear that Level 5 didn't read **Edge**'s review. If only there was an option to turn the music off...

Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille zur Macht

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **Monolith** Price: **$50 (£32)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E100**

With 20-odd hours of cumulative passive inactivity, twice as long as it will take the average player to complete *MGS2*, *Xenosaga* takes its cut-scenes very seriously. Anyone who baulked at Kojima-san's cinematic opulence is advised to turn away now. We're a long way from *Night Trap* here, but the question remains the same: can the interactive film actually be any fun?

Players who enjoyed *Xenogears* on PSone will recognise the hallmarks of excellent set-pieces, deep characterisation and involved storyline. This pseudo follow-up forms the first episode in a new six-part saga that will allegedly be released on three platforms over the next decade. *Xenosaga's* subtitle alludes to its grandiose pretensions and Monolith is clearly looking to redefine the weary videogame classification 'epic'.

The action takes the traditional RPG order of play: cut-scene, exploration then battle. The first two hours feel characteristically slow and are spent getting to grips with the deep and excellent fighting system. The developer steers the player through these obligatory sequences with some flair but it's only when plot camera pans out that one realises how director Tetsuya Takahashi's obsession with the material has created a world of Lucas-esque proportions, depth, dynamics and, importantly, consistence.

Cut-scenes are well directed and helped by an intelligent, sometimes witty dialogue. The plot burns slowly but gathers speed and intensity proportionate to the 40-odd hours it takes to complete, and, unlike so many Japanese attempts at science fiction ethics, *Xenosaga* often asks interesting questions. However, the storyline and gameplay sections have not been integrated as well as they might and the two sections frequently feel like disparate halves failing to complete a whole.

Enemies are visible in the field, eliminating randomness, and this will be enough to turn RPG deserters' heads. The battles are also very demanding for those weaned on recent Squaresoft games. At every battle, failure is a keen reality. Currency is not handed out freely and so you have to plan spending and character development carefully: all changes that help keep the formula fresh.

Xenosaga is the antithesis of the arcade fix and, despite the fact that this stance is unfashionable at the moment, comes highly recommended, not least because it offers a different view of gaming's future.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Top scoring

Xenosaga chooses to keep its music for cut-scenes and battles alone. All sections where player has control on the field are punctuated only by sound effects, which help add a lot to the atmosphere. Yasunori Mitsuda, fast becoming Japanese videogaming's John Williams, has created a beautiful score full of thematic echoes from the first game. The London Philharmonic provided the playing and the OST is recommended to all.





An intriguing email system exists in the game similar to that found in *Front Mission 3*. This allows email-based sidequests to open up. Namco frequently sends through adverts for its other titles and you can invest in different companies found in the game in a pseudo stock market. Nietzsche would have turned in his grave



Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PC, PS2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **LucasArts (The Collective)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**112

If games were measured by how many times they made you scream at the television set then *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb* would be a poor specimen indeed. Instant deaths, glitchy combat, uninspiring boss encounters and twitchy controls conspire to make this a below-par experience. If it wasn't for occasional flashes of imagination and the familiarity and richness conveyed through the licence then *The Emperor's Tomb* would be utterly forgettable.

Your initial impression of the game is likely to be good. Indy climbs, leaps and swings across treacherous chasms with great energy. But then you'll begin pulling levers, swimming in crocodile-infested waters and triggering mechanisms by moving objects around. By the end of Ceylon – the first level in the game – you'll wonder how any of this differs from *Tomb Raider* circa 1996.

Fortunately the locations show enough variety to prevent the game from turning into another Lara tribute. Prague's castle interiors are particularly fetching and scaling the level's lofty bell tower induces genuine vertigo. The puzzles range from simple switch pulling to clock-dial manipulation and, while they are never inspired, add some substance to the clichéd platforming. In terms of content, *The Emperor's Tomb* ticks all the right boxes – handy icons even show you where to place demo charges to break down weakened walls. A traditional platform adventure then, elevated by classic Indiana Jones scenarios?

Not quite. Too much of this game shows a disconcerting lack of polish. Just when the combat begins to impress you (see Fight club) it breaks down because of a bad camera and AI routines that see foes walking around in circles. While the analogue controls allow for some leeway when jumping and clutching onto distant ledges, there are too many instant-death situations for a game which has upwards of 20-minute segments between save points. This results in you having to repeat arduous platforming sections more times than is good for your sanity.

Patient gamers with a passion for platform/puzzle games will derive some entertainment out of LucasArts' latest effort, but *The Emperor's Tomb* could have been so much better. Some good honest playtesting might have ironed out some of the more glaring issues, but there's no excuse for level design that sees you repeating lengthy sections over and over again.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

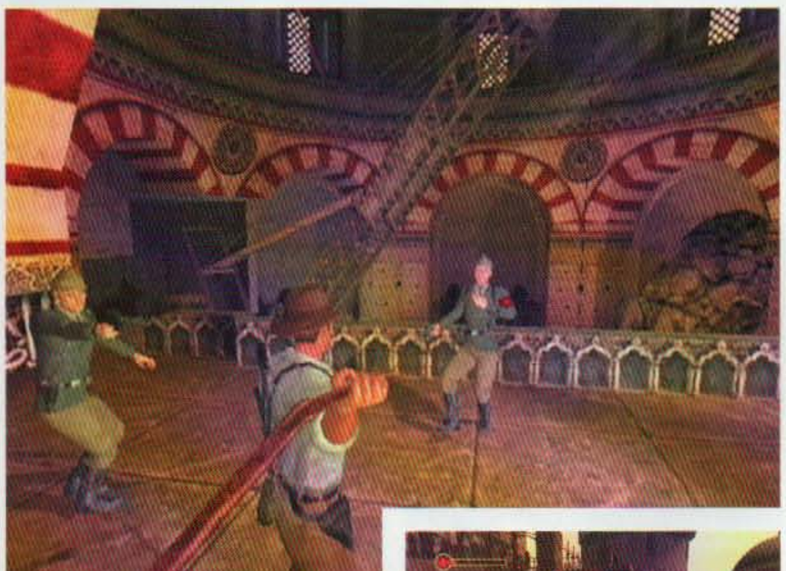








The boss encounters (below) are some of the worst **Edge** has encountered. It's a pity that such moments spoil what is otherwise a decent title



In theory Indy's bullwhip can snatch weapons out of the hands of enemies, but in practice the device is clumsy. Combat can be fun when the camera is behaving, though too often you'll find enemies getting an advantage through no fault of your own



Fight club

The game's combat is initially impressive with enemies using the objects around them to get an advantage. You can wallop foes with chairs, clubs, guns and grenades but all of these weapons can also be turned against you. Satisfying at times, the combat manages to capture the daring-do spirit of the Indy films. Unfortunately it's also here where the game's lack of polish comes through: you'll often experience enemies walking into walls while the bodies of defeated foes sometimes remain dormant or completely disappear with little logic.

Freelancer

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Digital Anvil** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E121**









The *Freelancer* universe is incomparably detailed. Each and every pilot is given a name, the radio channels reverberate with chatter from nearby craft, and the universe is constructed with coherent and varied 3D geography







The cut-scenes in space stations and on planet surfaces work well enough, but it's in space that *Freelancer* shines. The texture-rich game art owes a heavy debt to the blueprint established by Kubrick

Persistence of vision

In place of the mooted massively multiplayer online experience, *Freelancer* presents a more modest *Quake*-inspired system whereby gamers set up their own servers. Unsurprisingly, this results in a huge number of available games, with each massive universe populated by a relatively miniscule number of players. It's possible to chat, meet up and tackle missions in teams – another aspect of the game that echoes Blizzard's *Diablo*. But with the narrative element removed from the multiplayer mode such online adventures are muted, to say the least.

With a familiar blend of combat, trading and narrative elements, after six years of strained development the final *Freelancer* design bears closer comparison with its forebears than expected yet it does hide its troubled past surprisingly well. Few PC titles are as opulently furnished or finely detailed. And the game has at least delivered on the promise to present an open-ended universe, though in reality this merely translates into the ability to dip in and out of the scripted encounters, while also ferrying between planets and space stations and amassing riches and firepower through trading, bounty hunting, mining or signing up for randomly generated missions. In truth the variety offered by such tasks is limited and the economic model used basic, though the ability to align with or against the many different factions provides a welcome expansion beyond the usual innocent/criminal rating system.

It's online that *Freelancer* has most obviously been cut down to size. In place of a massively multiplayer environment is a more familiar setup whereby anyone can host their own, more modest online universe. Sadly, playing on small-scale servers adds little to the *Freelancer* experience, and because characters can't be moved from one game to another, a poor initial choice of server has severe repercussions.

Real innovation is instead to be found in the implementation of the much-debated mouse-driven control system. It's a move that succeeds in making *Freelancer* the most approachable space shooting/trading game ever, but also carries a heavy price. Gamers expect space combat to be an evolution of air combat – as Capcom's Xbox title *Steel Battalion* so handsomely demonstrates, gamers crave a more physical way of engaging in sci-fi action. *Freelancer* comes across like a cousin to *Diablo*, but what added pace to the roleplaying genre turns the shoot 'em up into a simplistic fight to place the mouse cursor over a target.

Freelancer is remarkably compelling. The desire to work through the engaging plot and the greed for greater riches and improved firepower are reliably effective mechanisms, and that richly detailed universe adds greatly to the journey. But there's only so much joy to be found in repetition, particularly when dogfighting interludes are so mannered. Ultimately, it's difficult to recall what all the fuss was ever about.

Edge rating: **Five** out of **ten**

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Novalogic** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E115**

It is surely only a matter of time before recent conflicts in the Middle East become videogames. And if any games company is going to be making one such game, it's more than likely to be US-based military-action specialists, Novalogic. Indeed, the company's most recent effort was the appalling *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger*, a knock-off cash-in on the *Delta Force* series based on the current situation in Afghanistan and rushed out in time to still be topical. It was an abysmal failure.

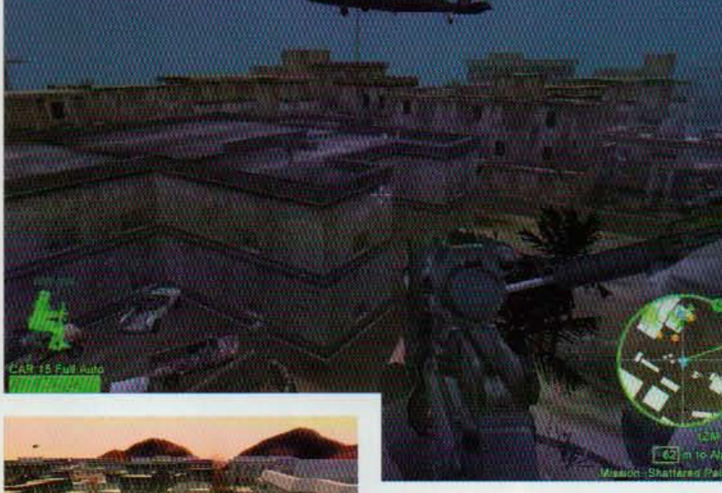
Black Hawk Down on the other hand is not a failure. Far from it, in fact. This latest instalment of the series isn't simply a return to form; it's a form-surpassing achievement of no mean merit. *Black Hawk Down* easily matches Novalogic's previous best, *Delta Force II*, and beats it in many regards. This is a soldier sim with the emphasis on tightly scripted, high-content missions. The action is heterogeneous and the missions would be nail biting, were you able to lift you hands from the controls for even a second.

As with all mainstream PC firstperson shooters *Black Hawk Down* is enormously graphically sophisticated, managing to create some of the grittiest urban environments ever seen, while still working on a scale that many flight simulations would be proud of. But *Black Hawk Down* also manages to balance a heavy dose of realism in physics and actions with a solid injection of enjoyment.

This is a game that takes great stock in the stimulation that is to be garnered from playing with American military hardware, from sniper rifles to manning the miniguns on a Black Hawk gunship. *Black Hawk Down* consistently delivers solid, if unexceptional, entertainment, creating believable scenarios and challenging fight sequences. The team-based action works splendidly, with only the slightest of quivers in the AI, from which much is expected in the complex and diverse level mechanics. Your team will offer covering fire, tell you what they're up to, warn of incoming enemies and generally help out.

If you can stomach the precarious ethical nature of yet another PC firstperson shooter that takes American intervention in the very serious political quagmire that is Somalia as its subject matter, then this game makes for a varied and engrossing piece of gun-action. Just don't expect it to be the game of the film.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Much of the action is based around vehicles, including boats and helicopters. These add a welcome sense of realism and diversity to the otherwise combat-based challenges



Call me a chopper

While the US military seems pretty sparse on the chopper gags, it does boast an impressive array of helicopters, which are frequently integrated into the action of this latest *Delta Force* piece. The game uses a modified version of its Comanche 4 engine, meaning that soaring across large landscapes in the Black Hawk blends seamlessly with gritty infantry groundwork and specialist urban assaults. While *Black Hawk Down* isn't anything we haven't seen before, it does suggest a new direction for Novalogic, who seems to be getting the hang of making decent games at last.







The environments in *Black Hawk Down* don't manage the incredible effects of some recent FPSs, but they are beautiful and well populated. Aggressive locals will even hurl stones and abuse at your soldiers

Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house (Sega-AM2)** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), June (UK)** Previously in **E**108









Virtua Fighter 4 fans will be pleased to learn that some of the original's graphical flaws have been ironed out for this update. Now it is as close to the Naomi 2 version as you could hope for on PS2. Obsessives will be spending much time in the shop (right), where hundreds of items can be purchased

Shopping is in fashion. Is this a novel way of getting girls interested in gaming, or is it just a peculiar Japanese trend? Whatever the case, accessorising is one of the main features that Sega-AM2 has expanded upon in its update of *VF4*. From wigs and contact lenses through to scuba diving gear, the array of items available to buy in *Evolution* is bewildering.

The Kumite mode of the original has been scrapped in favour of Quest mode which sees your chosen combatant duking it out in Sega World West and Event Square. The latter offers an impressive range of contests, like the Iron Fight tournament (punches and kicks do less damage) or the Hyper Action battle (your combos speed up as they connect). Do well in these tournaments and you will increase your ranking and earn cash for those all-important shopping sprees.

But apart from minor graphical tweaks and two fresh characters (Brad Burns and Goh Hinogami), *VF4E* remains much the same game. Environments still fail to compare well to *DoA3*'s, and body/limb locking and connections are a little off at times. It remains furiously competitive in versus mode, but it's not the leap forward **Edge** was hoping for.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**121

This is a puzzle game, so you'll immediately recognise the basic game dynamic. Pairs of gems fall from the top of the screen, just like *Puyo Puyo*. Unlike Sega's excellent puzzler, though, they come (broadly) in two types: the standard gems, which are static and inert, and circular gems, which cause standard gems of the same colour to crumble when placed in direct proximity. The idea is to group together as many standard gems as possible – since when rectangular arrangements of gems are made they form bigger, more powerful gems – and then burst them before your opponent does the same to you.

Yes, we've been here before, but *Puzzle Fighter* is one of the handful of *Tetris* clones that at least lies in the same league as Pajitnov's masterwork. This version is arcade-perfect, coming with 'puzzle' sections to unlock extras. These are simple one-round battles against set opponents, but they do provide a distraction from the main event, as does the system link and single-GBA twoplayer mode. That's where *Puzzle Fighter*'s best – as a distraction, something to dip in and out of – and it's unlikely any buyer aware of that will be anything other than delighted.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Each of the super-deformed Capcom characters comes with his or her own attack pattern, which represents the colour of gems he or she will thrust on to the opponent's half of the screen when gems are destroyed. The system is similar to that commonly seen in Taito's *Puzzle Bobble* aka *Bust-a-Move*

The Lost Vikings

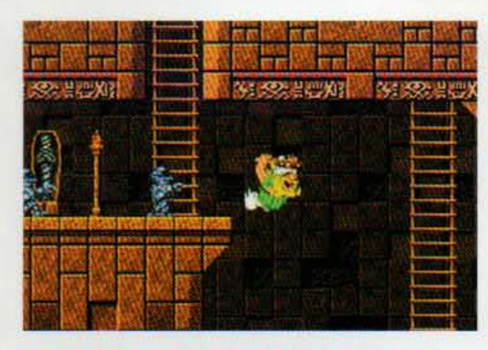
Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Blizzard Entertainment** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

I am Erik the Swift," exclaims the first of your vikings in the rather whimsical rolling tutorial, "I can run like the wind and leap huts in a single bound." Unsurprisingly, his fellow vikings, Olaf the Stout and Baleog the Fierce, also have a number of helpful attributes, with Olaf possessing the ability to block enemies, glide and provide a platform with his shield, while Baleog – the archer and swordsman of the trio – can flick switches from a distance and dispatch enemies.

Teamwork is the order of the day here. Levels consist of increasingly intricate 2D platforming 'mazes' replete with obstacles that can only be overcome through judicious use of each viking's unique skill set. Keys situated on higher ground, for instance, need Olaf's shield to provide much-needed elevation so that Erik can make that crucial jump. It's a simple dynamic, granted, but its execution is certainly satisfying, more so on encountering the tougher puzzles which require a great deal of consideration.

This is a welcome conversion of Blizzard's cherished 16bit strategy actioner and well worth a punt for those who like to challenge their grey matter as well as their reflexes.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Many of the puzzles require one viking to scout the way ahead, triggering switches and defeating foes so that the lesser-equipped members of the party may continue. It all starts out in simplistic fashion, of course, but swiftly becomes a matter of hard, concerted planning

Biohazard Gun Survivor 4: Heroes Never Die

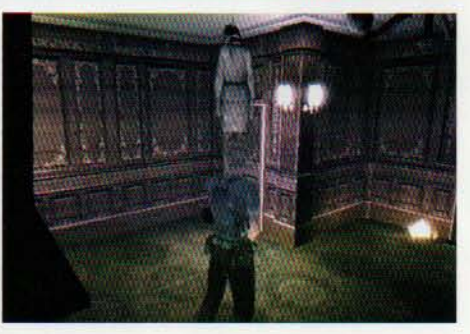
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



The challenge grows increasingly frenzied as the game progresses: you won't want to waste a single smidgeon of ammo if you're to survive your way through each level







Blending thirdperson action and firstperson lightgun blasting to create an entertaining genre of its own, this fourth *Survivor* title is a return to the *Resident Evil* world, complete with legions of moaning zombies and more spectacular supernatural beasts. It's simple and dumb, but pushes most of the right buttons, both in terms of atmosphere and tension in play. While not doing anything particularly innovative *Gun Survivor 4* is frenetic, fun and supremely challenging on its 'extreme' difficulty setting.

Neither shooting or exploration is particularly deep, however, so despite the lovely presentation, this could well leave fans of both genres feeling a little dissatisfied. The exploration mode can be a little fiddly and it generally entails unsophisticated running about picking up keys. Nor is the shooting action as inventive as some games in the lightgun arena, despite a zombie-ridden city providing a consistent challenge for the reflexes. The fact that enemies can attack from all sides means that you have to think about movement and positioning as you blast your way through a game.

It's all simplistic fun, then, but nothing that'll keep you indoors for the summer.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega/Infogrames** Developer: **Sonic Team** Price: **£40** Release: **Out Now**









The rich new environments in the GameCube's *Episode II* make the Dreamcast originals look quite tired. But Sonic Team has done little to update the older locations, choosing instead to alter some of the basic effects, like the Telepipe, while unfortunately retaining the pop-up evident in the game's more open areas

This expanded and tweaked GC edition of *PSO* (divided into two episodes) retains the levels and features from the DC's *Ver.2*, with the addition of a similarly sized collection of attractive new locales and a fully refurbished Pioneer 2 from which to access them.

The online experience, however, has changed little. The servers are as stable as before, the simplistic process of slashing through identikit enemies to increase levels and hunting for those elusive rare items remains intact, but the sense of community (thanks to a minimal proliferation of hacking and duping) has improved a great deal since the fabric of the DC predecessor descended into chaos.

However, the opportunity to make valuable changes has been wasted – the addition of a manually controlled camera, team-based battles, and a stronger necessity for cooperative play have been bypassed. Instead, the only significant additions are three fresh character types, a new roster of downloadable quests, GBA minigames, and a fourplayer splitscreen mode.

Regardless, for those willing to invest in all of the paraphernalia required to experience it, *Phantasy Star Online* remains a beguiling prospect.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

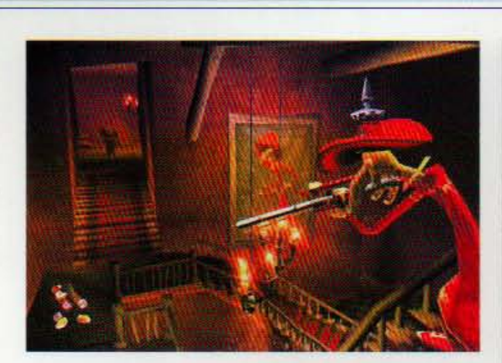
Format: **GC (version tested), PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Rayman's commercial performance has been a perennial source of cheer for Ubi Soft, and this instalment demonstrates once again the series' high production values and rich sense of characterisation. *Hoodlum Havoc*'s hyperactive styling and pacing match those of any Saturday morning cartoon, but while this will no doubt be sufficient for the game's intended audience, older, more cynical gamers, who have had their platforming palate dulled by countless similar titles, will be less willing to forgive the game's basic flaws.

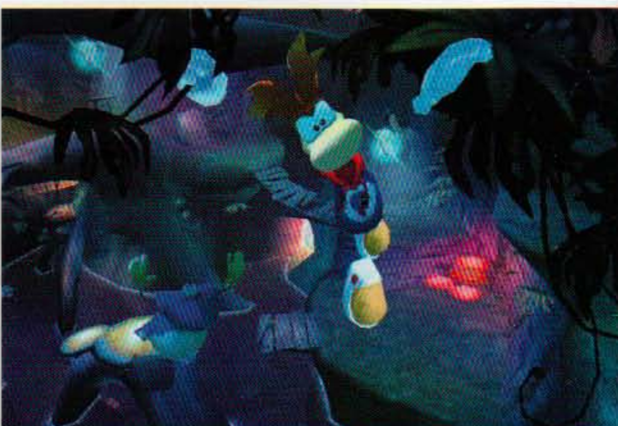
The first of these is the game's camera – always the most crucial aspect of any 3D platformer. Here it is as wayward as they get (and lacks the finessed controls of *Mario Sunshine*), frequently making basic actions more difficult than they should be. And though it's not difficult, there are several frustrating moments due to deficient level design (eg the *Rez/Frequency*-inspired interlude sections, which are a real test of patience).

A plethora of minigames, varying from GBA link-up karting to tennis and firstperson shooting, mollifies the impact of such flaws, but in general the quantity and originality of these games outweighs their quality. Which leaves a rather average taste in the mouth.

Edge rating: Five out of ten







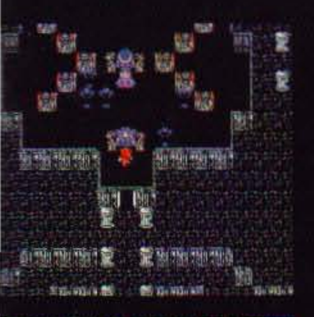


There's a certain amount of wit and flair evident throughout *Hoodlum Havoc*'s cut-scenes, and there are certainly some very slick production values. The problem is just that, in terms of raw enjoyment, the game is somehow underwhelming. It's not bad, by any means, and it doesn't seem like a cynical attempt to cash in, either. It just fails to ever rise beyond the level of mundane

Final Fantasy

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **NES** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Square** Release: **1990**





ur party is represented by a singular aracter as it navigates the map (above)

Final Fantasy arrives in the west with little fanfare. Released three years ago in Japan the game builds upon the Tolkien-esque setting and D&D-style mechanics fast becoming standard fare for this emerging Japanese genre.

While Enix's *Dragon Warrior* games first introduced US gamers to the console 'RPG', *Final Fantasy* is the first title seemingly advancing the form. Opening with a complex backstory one can see how Square (known in the west for *Rad Racer*) is attempting to build a world quite unlike the childlike *Zelda No Densetsu*.

Four evil spirits have stolen four crystals – each representing the balancing elemental powers of earth, fire, water and air – resulting in a world infestation of monsters. The player assumes the role of four light warriors, adventurers fated to combat evil and restore the world to former balance and peace.

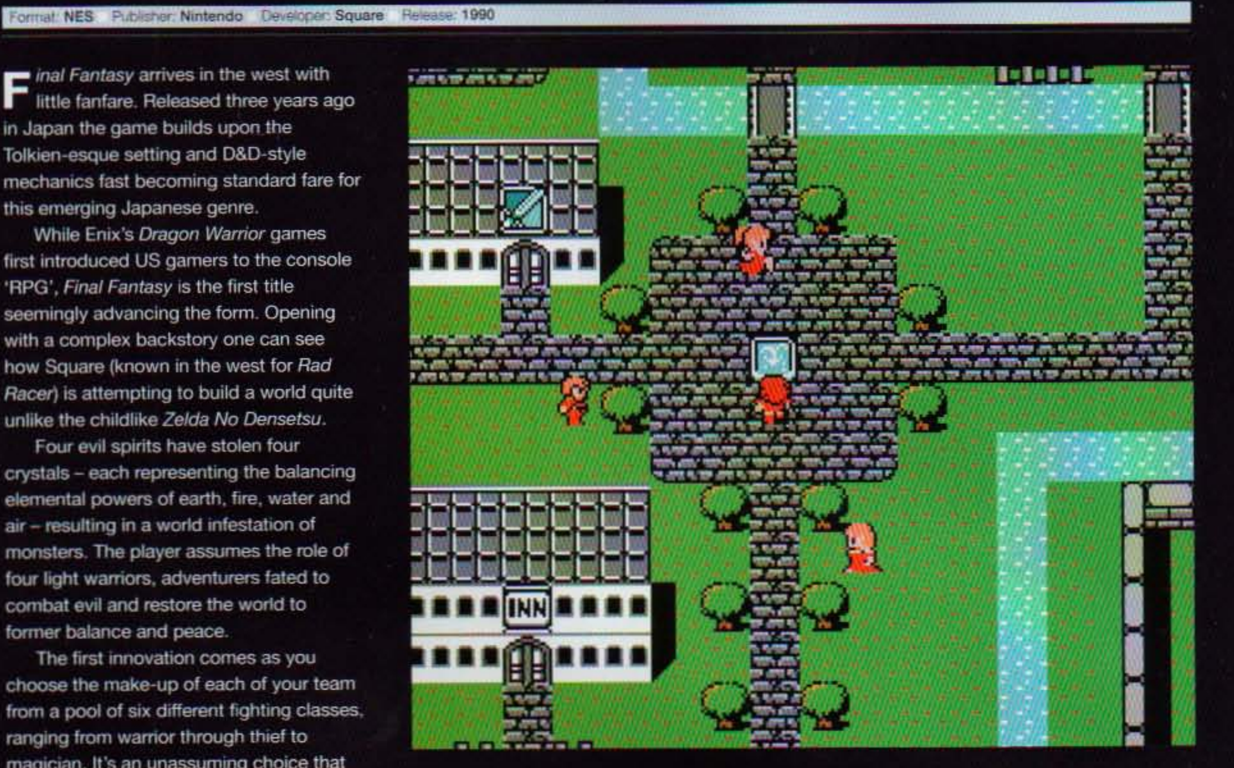
The first innovation comes as you choose the make-up of each of your team from a pool of six different fighting classes, ranging from warrior through thief to magician. It's an unassuming choice that will radically alter the way you need to play the game to succeed.

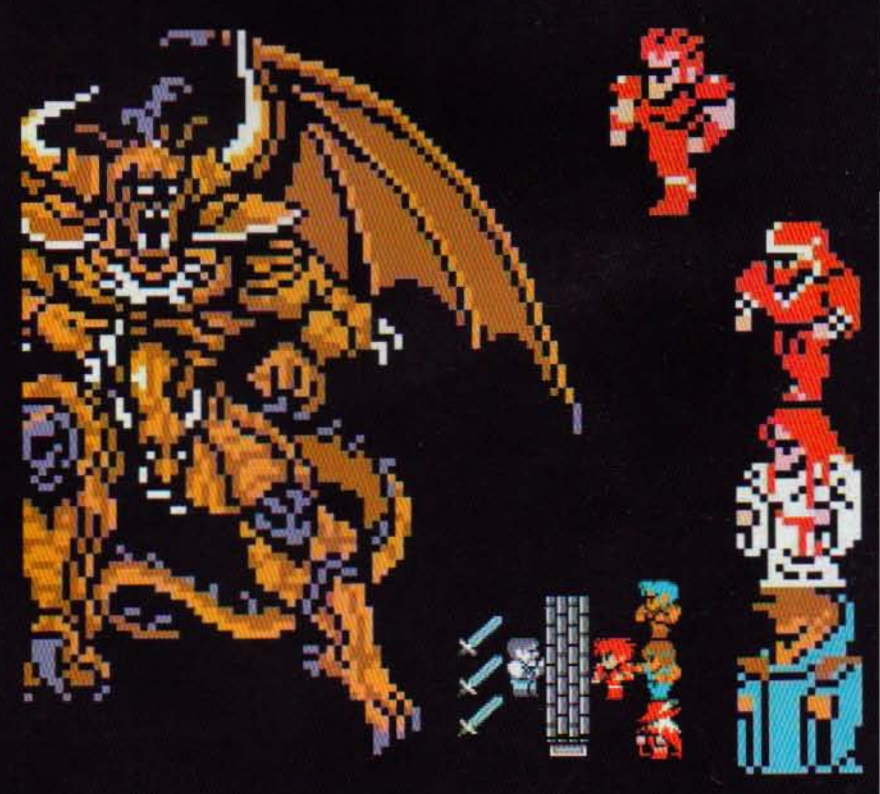
While Enix's *Dragon Warrior* has the player tackling even the simplest commands (such as talking) through a submenu, Square streamlines the controls to simply pressing A to talk and examine, with excellent results. In terms of mechanics the player must travel the world unravelling the plot while fighting monsters to level up their character. Spells are not just learned but bought with currency.

One major innovation is the plethora of boss encounters seen in the game. While previously the genre had you fighting just one final powerful enemy, *Final Fantasy* throws all manner of überfiends at you, greatly improving the gameplay. The plot is deep with betrayals, politics and major twists helped immeasurably by detailed graphics that put many far shorter NES games to shame. The musical score, too, is stunning, provoking emotions that have rarely been felt in videogames before.

However, while *Final Fantasy* has already spawned two sequels in its homeland, there are no guarantees the number-crunching gameplay will catch on in the west.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten







Long and winding road

Final Fantasy was the only one of the three 8bit titles to make it to the US and despite selling more copies there than it had on original release in Japan, it did not cause a storm. It's obviously very basic by today's standards but as a history piece it is playable, enjoyable and demonstrates the emergent genre elements that are so familiar today.



The making of...

Final Fantasy VII

3.28m sales in Japan, 2.92m in the US and 1.77m in Europe. Three CDs. Over two years' development. Over 100 team members. Nine out of ten. Adults in tears. But Final Fantasy VII represents much more than cold record-breaking statistics. Here was the catalyst for the worldwide RPG revolution...

Original format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Squaresoft**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Original release date: **1997**

"This was undoubtedly the game that changed everything." **Yoshinori Kitase**, director of the most important RPG ever, has cause for hyperbole. "We felt a wind of change inside the company during the development process. There was this incredible feeling I'll never forget: we were making a new thing... making history. Imagine." He pauses. Imagine.

At the time there were many doubters, but Kitase-san's instinct proved right; *Final Fantasy VII* eventually propelled the high-production RPG into one of the most popular videogame genres worldwide. The first demo of the title, creatively bundled on an extra disk with Square's first 32bit offering, *Tobal No.1*, stunned the world with its steam punk setting, achingly melancholic score and arresting visuals. And it bore evidence of a huge team working on a title with aspirations not yet thought possible in the medium of videogames. "There were a huge number of people we had never worked with before.





Squaresoft's translation to English, while US-centric, was actually very good compared to its peers. The western release was then repackaged for Japan as *FFVII International*

Up until that point Squaresoft's teams had only ever dealt with the traditional 2D medium. All of a sudden we had new people coming in working with software like Power Animator and SoftImage that we had never heard of before. From an industry point of view, it was unbelievable what we were trying to achieve. That is why we all had this strong feeling; this great enthusiasm."

"We felt a wind of change inside the company during development. There was this incredible feeling I'll never forget: we were making a new thing… making history"

As the software houses were jumping from the 16bit systems to 32bit hardware, Squaresoft made the headlines for choosing Sony over previous soulmate Nintendo. The story behind the split is yet to be explained and as the two companies only recently kissed and made up (with the departure of warring Hirosohi Yamauchi from Nintendo and **Hironobu Sakaguchi** from Squaresoft) we're unlikely to anytime soon. Kitase-san is predictably diplomatic, "We had a big decision to make in terms of which hardware to use. Nintendo was not one step behind in terms of hardware. In fact, the N64 was quite attractive actually. But as our goal was to develop the next-generation RPG we came to the conclusion that only a high capacity mass storage media would facilitate what we wanted to achieve. This meant CD was the only option and so from that perspective, PlayStation was the only choice."

Access all areas

There was great pressure on the team to maximise the benefits of the new medium. "At that time Sakaguchi-san (Square's founder) was the series' producer. Right from the time the decision to go with CD was made he set down a ground rule for the team saying, 'If the player becomes aware of the access times we have failed.' So we tried many tricks to circumvent the issue such as offering animation while the game was loading data, etc. The constant fear for us having worked with cartridges for so many years was that the player would feel bored while waiting for loads. However, only CD media was able to facilitate more than 40 minutes of FMV movies so we virtually had the decision made for us."

Another dimension

Graphically Square was trying things only hinted at in the first generation of 32bit titles. Using polygonal characters on CG backgrounds and interspersing the action with streaming FMV was a bold aesthetic decision. "We were keen that the distinction between the in-game graphics and the CG movies sequences was not overly pronounced: something we could not have done on N64. The change of dimension into 3D was a massive one for the Square team. You could see the game with maps and angles that only 3D could offer and in terms of game characters, we were able to offer far greater, detailed animations, so they would look more real, more alive on screen. But it was a daunting task."

The change from *Final Fantasy VI* to *Final Fantasy VII* is as graphic a demonstration of the transition between 2D to 3D as one will see. Just how apprehensive was Kitase-san about this sea change? "It was during development that I realised the impact that 3D realistic CG visuals had on overseas players. In Japan, you have the manga culture with the traditional deformed style world design and characters that live through a story with very serious themes. Overseas, you don't have this. To be honest we were pretty confident that *FFVII*'s characters and graphics would be accepted overseas and ironically I was much more anxious to see how Japanese users would respond."









Undoubtedly at the heart of any RPG's success is the plot. No matter how good your battle system or locations, without quality scripting there will be no incentive for the player to play. It is testament to *FFVII*'s story that the game is widely regarded as the acme of the series and still frequently referenced today. While *Final Fantasy* games have traditionally always drawn upon a huge selection of myths and legends the seventh game used them as a framework for loftier ethical aspirations and ecologically conscious evangelism. "Sakaguchi had a great vision of the force behind the universe. He wanted to explore the idea that planets and people share the same basic energy and so are, in some way, intrinsically linked. He developed this philosophy from drawing upon other cultures that stated when a planet disappears an invisible energy is released into space. This energy goes to some place and concentrates to give life again when certain conditions are met. The same energy drives people. So no matter who or what this energy comes from, it will concentrate all together to give life to something or someone again."

These were ideas that the Squaresoft founder had long been toying with and it's unclear as to how much of the philosophy was pure fantastical fabrication and how much



was his own dogma. One thing is certain, they posed difficulties for Kitase-san, "Sakaguchi's ideas were incredibly difficult to represent in the game since they concerned an invisible abstract concept. It was something I'd never seen done in a game before. So, I came up with the Life Stream.

"This was an idea that planets have the same kinds of life systems as people's blood or nerve network. It allowed us to more clearly examine the issues we wanted to. Sakaguchi-san's main ideas for *FFVII* and the world he imagined for the game (the creatures, etc) were very closely integrated into the 'Final Fantasy' movie. *FFVII* and 'Final Fantasy' started at the same time in their development process and they share nearly identical roots. I may have to play/watch both again and compare all their common elements."

Although the lengthy FMV, random battles and an arcane combat system alienated some gamers – especially in the west where anecdotal evidence suggests it became the most returned game in history – the combination proved a winning formula for thousands who had never sampled such fare before. Boosting weapons and skills with Materia, summoning devastating guardians, scouring the planets' highest peaks and deepest oceans for secret items and raising and training Chocobo gave both fresh and old RPGers an inconceivably large universe to explore and revel in. It also provided us with a legendary videogame moment.

Death of a friend

Easily the most infamous and memorable character in *FFVII* was neither the main lead nor the central antagonist, although both Cloud and Sephiroth are premier examples of excellent design and characterisation, but rather a flower seller who appears for little more than a third of the game.

Tetsuya Nomura, character designer, conceived both the characters of Sephiroth and Aerith. "The main issues of contention for fans worldwide are still Aerith's death and the ending sequence with Sephiroth. With the plot I wanted people to feel something intense, to understand something. Back at the time we were designing the game I was frustrated with the perennial dramatic cliché where the protagonist loves someone very much and so has to sacrifice himself and die in a dramatic fashion in order to express that love. We found this was the case in both games and movies, both eastern and western. But I wanted to say something different, something realistic. I mean is it right to set such an example to people?"

Kitase-san is adamant that cultural art puts too high a value on the dramatically meaningful death, "In the real world things are very different. You just need to look around you. Nobody wants to die that way. People die of

"FFVII is arguably one of the most significant games of all time. Not just because it was so well executed, but mainly because of its wider significance to Sony"





The scene that fuelled a thousand Internet forums. The well rounded and complex characterisation of Sephiroth and Aerith was the only reason players cared so much

disease and accident. Death comes suddenly and there is no notion of good or bad attached to it. It leaves, not a dramatic feeling but a great emptiness. When you lose someone you loved very much you feel this big empty space and think, 'If I had known this was coming I would have done things differently.' These are the feelings I wanted to arouse in the players with Aerith's death relatively early in the game. Feelings of reality and not Hollywood."



The game's CGI is consistently excellent – especially given that the teams had only been working with Softimage for six months

Classic convention

At the time of release the Internet was awash with rumours that it was possible to resurrect Aerith. **Edge** wonders if this was ever the developer's intention? "The world was expecting us to bring her back to life, as this is the classic convention. But we did not. We had decided this from the beginning. There was a lot of reaction from Japanese users. Some of them were very sad about it while others were angry. We even received a lengthy petition addressed to our scenario writer asking for Aerith's revival. But there are many meanings in Aerith's death and that could never happen."

Final Fantasy VII is arguably one of the most significant games of all time. Not simply because it was so well conceived and executed, but mainly because of its wider significance to Sony. In Japan, history dictates that hardware cannot succeed without a best-selling RPG franchise. With *Final Fantasy VII* Squaresoft secured its position as king of the adventure tale and won Sony an army of fans both in Japan and the west.

The continued pressure Square receives to do a remake of the title is evidence of the game's continued popularity. **Edge** gently pursues the rumours, "If I were to redo the game on today's hardware I would like to make the characters more realistic, I mean like *FFX* for instance. I think I would try to include full voice support but I would definitely keep the very same plot and scenario. I know that other members of the team are eager to do the update but, currently, I have no plans. Cloud and Aerith have appeared in other titles (*Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Kingdom Hearts*) so it is possible *FFVII* characters will appear in a future title but there's many discussions to be had first."

Whether a new generation of videogamers get to experience this RPG in next-gen clothing is almost irrelevant. While few would go back to experience this epic again, it is one of those rare games that cast an emotional spell over legions of players. For that reason it will always remain the stuff of legend.



The sexual tension created by Cloud's relationship with Aerith and Tifa was keenly observed. *FFVII* is a lesson in how to recreate complex social scenarios – albeit in soap opera style

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 59, June 1998

If only Edge did advice columns. "After a romantic dinner at Restaurant Napalm, for example, couples may feel the urge to team up and shoot down invading alien forces within the confines of a hydraulically powered VR-based ride," sounds like the perfect way of saving a relationship, but turns out to be a description of Namco NamjaTown, aka What **Edge** Did On Its Summer Holidays. What **Edge** also did was go riding around the Motegi Honda circuit with one Toshihiro Nagoshi to promote *Daytona USA 2*.

What else? A huge preview of Appeal's *Outcast* made uneconomic use of a fifth-colour silver, while Capcom's *Vampire Savior* was the only splash of colour in an otherwise dour reviews section. And in Florida, two politicians attempted to ban violent videogames.

"The bill is trying to allow our society to protect itself and its young people," said one, "from the scourge of the rampant violence that permeates our society." Perhaps one day soon the videogame industry will have the lobbying power of the NRA, and this sort of thing will stop. But then what would Reset have to write about in five years' time?



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"If Katana arrives, we are confident that our polygons will be more entertaining than their polygons" SCEE president **Chris Deering** dismisses the Dreamcast before it's even named.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"A horribly tight deadline for **E**58's Sony supplement tested the good ship **Edge**'s hull strength to its limits last month" **Edge** explains away the typos in the *DOA* captions.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Forsaken (PS/PC; 8/10), *Dead Ball Zone* (PS; 6/10), *Vampire Savior* (Saturn; 7/10), *Spec Ops: Rangers Assault* (PC; 7/10), *Starcraft* (PC; 7/10), *Incoming* (PC; 8/10), *Circuit Breakers* (PS; 8/10), *Three Lions* (PS/PC; 7/10), *Star Wars Supremacy* (PC; 6/10), *Jane's F-15* (PC; 8/10), *G.A.S.P! Fighters NEXTream* (N64; 4/10), *Masters of Teras Kasi* (PS; 4/10), *Pitfall 3D: Beyond the Jungle* (PS; 6/10)



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1. *Total Annihilation* draws **Edge** out to Seattle for a spot of building freelance 2. *Xi* "has the potential to hold players engrossed for hours". **Edge** wants to see the sequel here, now 3. An AM1 team member in a dress, celebrating *Dynamite Deka 2* 4. Greg Fischbach, Acclaim CEO, thinks about cash-ins 5. *Incoming*, 7/10 6. *Glover*: "*Marble Madness* meets *Head over Heels*"

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Alex Ward, creative director of Criterion Games, recalls a revolutionary shooter





Ward has overseen the likes of *Burnout*, but his gaming background lies in deepest space

It was a healthy interest in swimming that led me to a very unhealthy interest in videogames. The local baths had a cafe which showcased the best coin-ops of the day. After several clones of *Space Invaders*, the insanely colourful *Frogger* got my attention. Then, one day, *Phoenix* appeared.

It was incredible, an evolution of the best bits of *Galaxian* and *Moon Cresta*. The background starfield was hypnotic, and the player ship seemed more alive than anything before. It was an all-out battle against the alien force.

The first wave was just an opener, carefully placed to lure you in. The simple sound effects were screeching and terrifying as the first wave divebombed your ship. If it became too much, you could bottle it and use the shield. But the birds, Jesus, the birds. A few swirling eggs soon mutated into flying alien beasts. Sure, you could shoot their wings off, but all too often it was wasted ammo, and a single shot to the head was what was needed.

The final glory was the mothership. It took a lot of credits before I could reach it, and then several months before I took it down. To me, it was more exciting than blowing up the Death Star. The cabinet stayed there for a long time, eventually to be replaced with *Space Harrier*. Then I lost my mind.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

First, I'd like to congratulate you on the articles in **E**121 about girl gamers. I especially enjoyed the articles about women in the industry, and finding that although in my local area I am among a minority of girl gamers, girls can go out and gain respect for their skills. It made a refreshing change for girls to be given the credit that they deserve as gamers playing whatever genre of game they like. Having played videogames since the BBC came out, and now owning all of the current consoles and several retro consoles, it is good to see girls being taken seriously within the videogame world.

Second, I would like to comment on Louis Badcock's letter (**E**121) about 'The State of Play Nation'. I disagree with his opinion that games are too long. Quite the opposite: I feel that many games are too short. Take *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Sure, it's a really well made and fun game to play, but when I sat down one Saturday evening to play it I finished it the same night. Admittedly that was only with one character but three evenings to complete a whole game is too short. In comparison *Final Fantasy X* kept me occupied for over 80 hours.

The fact is that most publishers put games out at full price whether they are short or long, and most gamers would much rather play 40 hours of a £40 game than four hours of a £40 game. Yes, I agree that the price of games is too high, but please don't give us less fun by shortening the games.
Helen O'Toole

Perhaps videogame publishers should consider a variable pricing structure that reflects game length – as opposed to one that reflects either quality (or, more specifically, lack of quality) or the amount of time since a game's release. Which is the pricing model that would currently appear to be in use. We can but hope.

Thanks for your girl issue. I am a woman of 41 with a family and other interests who also happens to enjoy videogames. Shock horror! The idea of games targeted at women sounds faintly repellent, putting me in mind of 'Friends', 'Bridget Jones's Diary' or 'Cold Feet' spin-offs. A truly horrific thought. Anyway, thanks for your positive attitude to women and let's hope that one per cent readership proportion improves.
Sally Hewison

What's wrong with games based on 'Friends'? Or 'Bridget Jones's Diary' for that matter? Although we take your point about 'Cold Feet'.

Although not a member of the original generation of hardcore gamers, who grew up in the age of the C64 and Atari 2600, I would still consider myself an avid gamer and I am currently a student on a Computer Games Programming degree course and therefore surrounded by budding developers on a daily basis. I would like to make clear though that it is not just older gamers who are getting bored with the current generation of derivative titles.

Such boredom seems to be a sentiment shared by most gamers of my age. But since within the next one or two years we will, hopefully, be leaving university to pursue careers in the videogame industry, I am beginning to feel we may be heading towards a face-off with massmarket-obsessed publishers. Whether this will have any affect on the type, or quality, of games being developed over the next few years is hard to say, but students like myself are unlikely to just roll over quietly; we are all very passionate about the videogame industry and determined to have our say about its future. Maybe our views will not be heeded and we will go quietly into the night, but either way the next few years seem likely to be some of the most interesting in the history of the videogame industry.
J Ross Keverne

The issue touched upon by RedEye, Steven Poole and Mr Biffo (**E**122), about the joys of videogames of old, is a particular favourite of mine, and one that never fails to get my blood boiling. All I can say is that I'm glad to hear that there is at least one other person out there who shares my view. Thank you, Mr Biffo.

I would like to extend the argument a little, though. Mr Biffo conceded, as I do, that the current catalogue of games for the three main console platforms is choc-a-bloc with lazy ports, lazy licences and lazy lookalikes. The PC market is probably even more saturated. But am I the only one who realises that this has always been the case?

I am currently 24 years old, and I have been playing games for as long as I can remember – just like nearly every other **Edge** reader. I have many memories of great games being played on my Spectrum 48K, but I can just as vividly recall standing in front of the selection of games available in John Menzies, unable to differentiate between the samey titles, mistakenly believing that the £3.99 titles would be better than the £2.99 titles, £2.99 better than £1.99 and so on. Of the 100-plus titles I owned, around 75 per cent were simply trash that never got played.

The letters to **Edge** bemoaning the demise of quality games are simply so narrow-minded and rose tinted it's unbelievable.
Andrew Merson

Nostalgia is a powerful sentiment, there's no doubt about that. And you're right to point out that previous generations of gamers have been subject to a raft of lazy cash-ins. But it's **Edge**'s belief that, though there are plenty of videogames out there that eclipse anything that's gone before, there is also a greater number of averageware titles, sapping too many hours, featuring too many design flaws that are obvious and easily corrected, than ever before. And unfortunately, it's all too likely that the youthful optimism of future generations of coders will be insufficient to remedy this fact without major structural change.

"The current catalogue of games is choc-a-bloc with lazy ports, lazy licences and lazy lookalikes. But am I the only one who realises that this has always been the case?"



Apologies for banging on, but *Ico* really is rather good. Just imagine a world where it was actually promoted to consumers, instead of left to languish

I think Steve Austin was stone cold wrong when he called the BBC Model B a "'sensible' computer that schools and kids who wore Clarks shoes used to play with" (**E**122).

I remember playing on *Repton*, and it was excruciatingly hard as a six-year-old kid. But it was also immensely rewarding, and became my first obsession game. I loved my copy of *Moon Cresta*, and my copy of *Microids* and all the other great games out there for it. But I also owned a C64, and I still own one now. It will forever hold a place in my heart, alongside the masses of Mastertronic games and Ocean film licences with it (*180* on the C64 has never been bettered as a darts game).

Also, I take issue at the idea of games not being as impressive as they once were. I remember my first go on an Amiga, playing *Super Hang-On*, and loving every minute. I remember my first game of *Sonic the Hedgehog*. But then I also remember the first time I saw the *Dinosaur* demo on the PSone, or the first time I played *Soul Calibur* on the Dreamcast, or even the amazement and excitement of GameCube *Burnout*.

I still love my C64, my BBC Micro and even my trusty GameGear. The point is, it doesn't matter where, when, or how you discover games. A good game is a good game, regardless of format, polygon/sprite count, or licence.
Rob Mortimer

Let's see, recently we've had *Master of Orion 3*, *Command and Conquer: Generals* and we've got *Steel Battalion*, *Freelancer* and *Metroid Prime* coming out. I don't know about everyone else, but between my Xbox and PC I manage to find at least one game to buy each month, and usually two or three. Is the industry having a mid-life crisis, or are some of the previously hardcore fans simply finding that they have more obligations than hours these days?
Iain Howe

To play devil's advocate for a second, four of the titles you mention are sequels or remakes, and the fifth isn't as exciting as its custom-built peripheral. But in answer to your question, surely the answer is that it's a combination of the two. And if it is the case that a generation of hardcore gamers simply doesn't have as much spare time to play games as it used to, why aren't more videogames designed with this fact in mind?

E122 must have been one of the gloomiest gaming publications I have ever read. What was the desired effect, though? Surely not just to encourage readers to dump their consoles and copies of **Edge**, and pick up a hobby in a more thriving area (extreme ironing?). What then? Perhaps to highlight that there is a problem. Well you didn't need to use all of the long words in **Edge**'s vocabulary to tell us that. We can already find that out for ourselves by simply scanning over a copy of something like 'Computer and Video Games' and lamenting about how everything's so damned 'ace'. **Edge** simply replaces 'ace' with 'average' and is a bit more honest about the situation. Just like 'Computer and Video Games', though, it fails to come up with any good solutions and doesn't even try.

It is far, far too little to repeatedly place interesting/innovative/good games on ageing pedestals. How many times in every issue does **Edge** need to refer to *Ico*, *Rez* or *Super Monkey Ball*? And don't blame their lack of success on marketing. *Ico* failed to impress me at all; I bought *Rez* and enjoyed it, but only for a few hours; and *Super Monkey Ball* was fun for a weekend before I returned it to Game.

My suggestion is: no more naysaying. Come up with some good ideas for games by yourselves. Find new talent. Write features about little-known geniuses and why their games are original and successful. Indeed, give more examples of *successful* original games. What I think would also do a world of good for the magazine, is a 'Readers' Concepts' section. People in the industry are overstretched and overexposed to the same rubbish day in, day out. Fresh blood is always tasty. **Edge** could then be justified in telling developers how it should be done. Two wrongs do not make a right: Don't combat a grim circumstance with a grim negativity. It's just plain annoying to see a standard-bearer of quality gaming such as **Edge** do what it did in **E**122, which is to sigh and give up.

So come on and raise that flag to the sky, scream out some uplifting solutions, and encourage budding developers by giving them a real opportunity to sort this silly, silly business out.
Joe Gordon

Last issue might have appeared unnecessarily pessimistic, but it only reflected the sentiments of an increasing number of letters that we continue to receive each month; it would be remiss of us not to reflect such wide-ranging sentiment. And while **Edge** might not have offered a detailed solution, it's not really our place to do so. In any case, a good first step would surely be to admit that there's a problem. It's also not **Edge**'s job to come up with ideas for videogames. And it's not as simple as a section given over to design ideas from readers: as Peter Molyneux once said, almost everyone has a good idea for a game; it's getting it made that's the problem.

As for *Ico*, *Rez* and *Super Monkey Ball*, well, **Edge** will continue to refer to them for as long as they remain some of the best examples of creative risk-taking that doesn't compromise the overall enjoyment of a title. And though we're sorry that you didn't enjoy them, there's no denying the fact that each title received little or no marketing. It's interesting to ponder how well any one of them would have sold had they benefited from a high-profile promotional campaign. And though they might lack a genuinely universal appeal, it would certainly be interesting to consider how far, had they been marketed successfully, they might have won over new audiences for gaming in general.

After browsing a recent issue of **Edge** containing screens of the upcoming *Doom III*,

"It doesn't matter where, when, or how you discover games. A good game is a good game, regardless of format, polygon/sprite count, or licence"



Quake II: smoke and mirrors, or a testament to John Carmack's l33t skills? And just how important are programmers anyway?

I stopped and pondered: how great is the great John Carmack at programming, or better yet, how slick is the code he writes? Being a videogame programmer myself and understanding the inner workings of a computer a little better than the average user I set about the task of finding examples of Carmack's code, with the intent of uncovering the secrets of his mojo and the hope of learning something along the way. After a little research I stumbled upon the *Quake II* source code. After downloading the 1.4Mb source code, I worked my way through it, assisted only with a few dozen cups of caffeine. Then it dawned upon me...

The code was average. There was nothing within Carmack's code that you could really call a work of genius. On the contrary the code was unstructured, with little or no conformism to coding conventions; it had very few comments and the AI, weapons and animation sequences were all hard-coded, rather than being loaded dynamically through the use of scripts or other such mechanisms. In short, it was average. To think that companies bought into the success of *Quake II* believing it was all down to John Carmack's fabulous engine.

Disturbed by this discovery I continued to ponder. Why *do* programmers get given all the credit for games? Programmers generally have very little or no input into what actually makes it into a game. 2D and 3D graphics are made by the artists; the sound is either composed/recorded in-house by a full-time or contracted sound engineers; levels are created by level designers; and the game concepts are created by game designers. Programmers are, if you will, the light technicians at a concert. You can't have a concert without them but you also can't credit them for the performance. What is **Edge**'s view on this?
Mesut Serbest

Perhaps Carmack's genius lies in his ability to synthesise existing techniques to achieve novel results? As regards the importance of programmers, the licensing of game engines and the rise of middleware would suggest that the programmer's role might vary from game to game. But videogame development is indeed a collaborative art, and it would be unfair to diminish any one aspect of it.

Regarding RedEye's otaku bashing in **E**121: he got me spot on there. And yet he's wrong – the Japanese *do* make better games. And if not better, at least they provide better variety. Call it innovation or not, in Japan there is a market for games created for different age groups and both sexes. In the west, only games suited to a twentysomething male audience seems to get the approval of publishers.

I'm thankful there exists a place such as Japan. Without Japan I wouldn't still be playing games at the age of 32. Without Japan the only games made would be EA sports titles, racing games and FPSs, and they would probably be played on a PC.
Svenn A Ramlo

While RedEye is right to point out the fetishisation of Japanese culture in the west, he seems to have turned a 'blindeye' to the reasons for this happening in gaming circles. It is no wonder that Japan has become something of a holy land in the eyes of gamers when there are so many great Japanese games that go unreleased in Europe.

As for the word 'otaku' having negative connotations, why can't RedEye see that the use of the word when describing oneself is an appropriation of the original meaning. Consider the way the gay community and ethnic minorities have appropriated derogatory words to protect themselves. There's nothing wrong with **Edge** readers calling themselves 'obsessive geeks', rather, it's when someone else uses the term to describe them that it becomes an unwelcome and derogatory remark.
Ashley Day

You're both right, of course. RedEye is just a bitter old cynic and **Edge** constantly disagrees with him. Which usually prompts him to call us a bunch of obsessive geeks.

Steven Poole's Trigger Happy article in **E**122 made me think about the lack of innovation in PC firstperson shooters. Far too many games in this genre are designed around a 'shoot everything that moves' philosophy. Personally, I have become extremely bored of this type of gameplay, which is precisely why I have found the vast majority of recent firstperson shooters on the PC to be rubbish.

I have always considered that the experience of a game is far more important than the end result. In other words, the enjoyment of simply playing the game is what matters, rather than the ability to score highly, or the speed at which a level can be completed.

Set in a massive, atmospheric virtual world, *Deus Ex* is a classic example of a game that has been designed to be experienced. In fact, it could be argued that avoiding armed conflict as much as possible considerably improves the gameplay, since the option to use stealth tactics has been implemented so impressively. The ability to complete difficult missions without firing a single shot provides a much greater sense of achievement than blasting your way through hundreds of enemies with a multi-barrelled rocket launcher under each arm.

Needless to say, there will be many gamers who disagree with that last sentence. They may even be punching the wall right now in fits of apoplectic fury. So be it. Let them convince themselves that *Serious Sam* is the future of PC gaming. Let them show the rest of us just how well they can bounce around like demented wallabies in *Quake III*. If they like that kind of gaming, then that's just fine.

It's just that some of us want so much more.
Christopher Low

Horses for courses, Christopher.

"There's nothing wrong with **Edge** readers calling themselves 'obsessive geeks', rather, it's when someone else uses the term to describe them that it becomes unwelcome"





Arik get's quite emotional thinking about the amount of hours spent playing *Final Fantasy VII*, while Mr Pin passed so much time learning new skills in Hyrule that he never wanted to leave

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: So you wanna be a game designer?
Poster: Mr Francis Fourfingers
Your challenge is this: reinvent old or current games by tweaking the title ever so slightly and provide a short blurb of how it might play. For example, *Super Junkie Ball*: Sickboy awakes from a night of heavy skag abuse to find himself trapped inside a translucent bubble, in a world full of giant crack bowls and gravity-defying reefers. But all is not as it seems... help Sickboy traverse hundreds of lushly detailed aerial stages and find the smack before his come-down-o-meter hits rock bottom! Six extra play modes include: Junkie Fight, Junkie Target, Junkie Bowling, Junkie Billiards, and Junkie Golf! Features bright, upbeat soundtrack, with Syd Barrett, Velvet Underground and The Fall.

Poster: JPickford
Ping: bounce microwaves around the oven by moving the reflector left and right. If it escapes, the legendary Poodle is toast.

Poster: Riposte
MimeSplitters: you and up to 15 friends run around gunning down people dressed in black who pretend to be trapped in invisible boxes.

Poster: Onion
Great Big Ego: run about a big city telling people just how bloody great you are.

Poster: franki
Pez: infiltrate a sweet factory to liberate the central AI. Your character shoots small sugary brick-shaped lozenges and can evolve through several animal- and cartoon-shaped heads.

Subject: In the end, it's all about you
Poster: Arik
The most emotional gaming experience I ever had was when I loaded up *Baldur's Gate 2* for the first time, and heard the music. Glorious, overblown orchestra, with just a hint of the style of the first game. I was virtually in tears, tears of sheer joy. Why was this? It can't have been any care for the characters, given that they had little personality beyond the 12 or so phrases that they'd had in the original game (or, in the case of the newer characters, they were even more boring). I had no love for the main character either, or his plight – Arik was a blank slate, defined by me but without quite enough room for me to define his personality the way I liked. So who did I cry for? Simple. I cried for me.

You see, I have a theory that emotion in gaming is defined not by what the developer puts into the game, but by what the player does. Fuck Aeris – or alternatively, don't, she's dead and you didn't care about her anyway. She's not real. You're real, and you've spent hours of your life bringing her up, and now she's died on you. It's your loss, not Cloud's, and any emotion you may feel is entirely because of that.

I could bring up a host of other examples – *Torment*, *Monkey Island*, *Chrono Trigger* – but it's not really necessary. Playing a game, and then its sequel with the same, built-up character, and then moving on to the expansion pack having spent hundreds of hours of your life developing your avatar. That's emotion.

Emotion in gaming is defined by what the player puts in, and so the most emotional game should, theoretically, be one you can put more into than any other. Discuss.

Poster: arada392
Are you implying that, given that videogames are an interactive medium that is controlled by the player, there is a tendency that emotion in games appeals to our narcissism? (And therefore there is no need for sympathy and/or empathy in games?)

I can see what you're saying with your example of *Final Fantasy VII*: yes, emotion in a game depends on gameplay – on the interaction between the user and the medium. This is also true of all other media. But this cannot happen without input from the developer as well: as much as the player builds up a character in a game, so must the developer also work so that the player feels that this development is worth the trouble.

Poster: Mr Pin
An interesting point.

I felt a similar feeling during *Ocarina of Time*. I was so drawn into Link's world, the sights, the sounds. By the end of the game, I had learned so many new skills and techniques. The ending was imminent, but part of me just wanted to stay in this world, and experience new wonders.

The time you put into an experience such as *Zelda* is rewarded several times over. However, if there was a game that could go on 'forever', I'm not sure that this would mean unbeatable emotional involvement.

For starters, it needs to be a quality piece of software, as outlined above. I also believe that it would have to have a defined beginning, middle and end, as these are the tools used by the designers to maximise the emotional effects of occurrences within the game.

"Emotion in gaming is defined by what the player puts in, and so the most emotional game should, theoretically, be one you can put more into than any other"

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